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ABSTRACT

Since their appearance in the early 1970s, family support programs have represented a new way of working with families, based on the partnership they establish with families, their acceptance in the community as an asset and resource for all families, and the trusting relationship they build with families who participate in these programs. This document is comprised of a 3-volume guide for planning and operating a family support center. a community-based program to provide formal and informal supports to families. Volume 1 of the document, "Program Planning and Evaluation," contains the following chapters: (1) "What Is a Family Support Center?"; (2) "Strategic Planning"; (3) "Programs: Developing the Core"; (4) "Programs: Meeting Community Needs"; (5) "Delivering Programs Effectively"; (6) "Evaluating Your Center"; and (7) "Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement." Volume 2, "Managing Ongoing Operations," offers information and guidance on: (8) "Staffing Your Center"; (9) "Creating an Optimal Space"; (10) "Budgeting and Financial Management"; (11) "Fundraising"; and (12) "Organizational Structure." Volume 3, "The Power of Partnership," contains the following chapters: (13) "Family Involvement and Leadership"; (14) "Collaborating in Your Community and Beyond"; (15) "Respecting and Strengthening Culture"; and (16) "Outreach and Communications." (KB)

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Volume I

Program Planning & Evaluation

Volume II

Managing Ongoing Operations

Volume III

The Power of Partnership

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A Program Manager's Toolkit

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Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit—Volume 1: Program Planning and Evaluation

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Volume 1: Program Planning and Evaluation

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Chapter 1

What Is a Family Support Center?

What Is a Family Support Center?

Family support centers believe that the best and most cost-effective way to help children succeed is to help those nurturing them become better teachers, role models, protectors, and providers. Family support centers help all family members achieve their goals and build on the love they have for one another, and they provide opportunities for families to build reciprocal, helping relationships with their neighbors.

—Virginia L. Mason, Executive Director, Family Support America

This is a guide for anyone who is either planning or operating a family support center. Family support centers are community-based programs that provide formal and informal supports to families. They are at the heart of the larger family support movement—a movement to strengthen and empower families and communities so that they can foster the optimal development of children, youth and adult family members. A family support center is a warm and welcoming place in the community to which any family can come, not only in times of need, but as a regular part of day-to-day life. Family support centers

- link families with each other, formal services, and community-based resources
- provide information about parenting and child development
- help strengthen the bonds among all family members
- provide services in a respectful and empowering manner
- do whatever it takes to meet the needs of the families and the communities they serve

Notes on Language

Parent

The term *parent* in this book means an adult caretaker participating in family support programs and services. Although many adults who take part in family support programs are not parents, to include all possibilities in each reference to program participants proved impossible due to the need to keep this book brief and practical for users.

Family

The term *family* in this book refers to a group of individuals joined by blood, marriage or other long-term commitment, and/or sense of mutual responsibility. Adoptive and foster families, extended families including fictive kin, and other nontraditional family structures are included.

This manual describes how to create and/or manage a family support center that really reflects the principles of family support in its day-to-day operations. Its chapters, divided among three volumes, provide information and guidance on:

Volume One
- What Is a Family Support Center? (chapter 1)
- Strategic Planning (chapter 2)
- Programs: Developing the Core (chapter 3)
- Programs: Meeting Community Needs (chapter 4)
- Delivering Programs Effectively (chapter 5)
- Evaluating Your Center (chapter 6)
- The Future of the Family Support Movement (chapter 7)

Volume Two

- Staffing Your Center (chapter 8)
- Creating an Optimal Space (chapter 9)
- Budgeting and Financial Management (chapter 10)
- Fundraising (chapter 11)
- Organizational Structure (chapter 12)

Volume Three

- Family Involvement and Leadership (chapter 13)
- Collaborating in Your Community and Beyond (chapter 14)
- Respecting and Strengthening Culture (chapter 15)
- Outreach and Communications (chapter 16)

History of Family Support

Family support centers arose from a number of social changes, beginning in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, that significantly altered family structures and patterns. The population became more mobile, and parents did the hard work of raising children without support from extended families. Divorce rates began to rise, as did the numbers of children born to unmarried mothers, raised in single-parent households, and/or raised by parents who worked outside the home.

At the same time, growing research revealed the importance of the early years in child development and the profound impact of the family on determining an individual's ability to learn and succeed in all settings—preschool, school, peer groups, higher education, and the workplace. This research clarified what many had long believed—that not only internal relationships but also forces outside a family exert tremendous influence on that family's ability to raise its children, and that the value of programs in supporting families should not be underestimated.

Finally, family support evolved from concerns over the ability of existing social-welfare programs to promote the healthy development of children and families. The founders of the family support movement sought to reduce abuse and neglect, school failure, alcohol and substance abuse, and other negative outcomes by preventing them rather than waiting until a crisis emerged.

In response to these issues, family support programs began appearing in the early 1970s and have been proliferating across the country ever since. The first programs arose spontaneously in communities across the country from grassroots associations of parents helping each other in the hard job of parenting. Their roots were in settlement houses, parent education efforts, Head Start programs, and self-help groups. Their goal was simple—to help parents access the information, resources, and social supports they needed to help their child grow and develop. (Weissbourd 1987, 50)

These programs represented a new way of working with families—a method based on the partnership they established with families, their acceptance in the community as an asset and resource for all families, and the trusting relationship built with the families who participate in these programs. As family support programs have become more known and supported, the movement has gained momentum at a local and national level. Other types of human services, such as health clinics and educational systems, have adopted the family support philosophy and have developed services (Jeppson, et al. 1997, 18) that resemble family support programs.

Family support programs have expanded and diversified since the 1970s. Programs now provide a broader range of services and serve families who have a diversity of strengths, needs, and backgrounds. The issues that family support programs address—access to child development information, development of parenting skills—are issues that cut across class, race and ethnicity. Yet, as family support programs have developed in a broader variety of communities, such as low-income communities, they have had to change in response to the needs of these communities. As families deal with issues of poverty, exposure to violence, and life in communities with few resources, they often bring a complex set of needs and concerns that go beyond the core services that family support programs have traditionally offered. Family support programs have expanded their focus in such communities to include community organizing, economic development, community safety and violence prevention, along with a range of activities aimed at promoting social and economic justice.

The spontaneously formed organizations of parents who wanted information, friendships, and support in raising their children are still there, but so are large, complex programs that are funded by a variety of public sources, identify target populations, and systematically measure outcomes. The friendly one-person staff that did everything from baking bread to caring for toddlers to producing newsletters has given way to the interdisciplinary team of professionals and trained paraprofessionals. Programs have expanded from providing social opportunities and workshops in child development to addressing a full range of issues from joblessness and illiteracy to child sexual abuse and teen parenting. Family support programs have moved from church basements and kitchen tables to workplaces, schools, health centers, social service agencies, and community gathering places.

At its core family support arises from and cultivates a societal commitment to supporting all families by building on the formal and informal systems that surround them. The settings in which family support programs operate vary widely, as do the types of services and resources they offer to families. But all family support centers are geared toward a common goal: increasing the ability of families to successfully nurture their children and the ability of all family members to achieve their goals.

Definition of Family Support

Family Support Is:

A set of beliefs and an approach to strengthening and empowering families and communities so that they can foster optimal development of children, youth, and adult family members

A type of grassroots, community-based program that provides resources for families while building relationships of equality and respect with and among families and the community

A shift in human services delivery that encourages public and private agencies to work together and to become more preventive, responsive, flexible, family-focused, strengths-based, and holistic—and thus more effective

A movement for social change that urges all of us—policymakers, program providers, parents, employers—to take responsibility for improving the lives of children and families and to join together as caring communities of citizens that put children and families first

The Family Support Approach

In 1991, a group of family support leaders convened at the Wingspread facilities in Racine, Wisconsin, to discuss training in family support. They decided it was important to state, as a field, the most important elements of family support practice. Family Support America began its multiyear project of leading and facilitating that process, which would culminate in its publishing of *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* in 1996. The guidelines are based on the input from more than 2,000 parents and practitioners in family support programs across the country. They fit into a framework for thinking about family support that includes

- **Premises** about our society and the world that underlie how we work with children and families
- **Principles**, based on these premises, that govern family support practice
- **Guidelines** that turn the principles into practice

Premises of Family Support

The philosophical premises for family support reflect a common set of beliefs about both the role of family support programs and our societal obligation to children and families.

1. **Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children.**

   Because families are the engine by which our future is produced, we must commit as a society to making the well-being of families a priority. This means ensuring that all segments of society—schools, businesses, communities, government, religious institutions—are working to strengthen and support families.

2. **Assuring the well-being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.**

   All families, regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic status, need support at some time and in some way. This means that family support needs to be universally available and accessible across communities.

3. **Children and families exist as part of an ecological system.**

   One cannot assure the healthy development of children without understanding the family system in which they live. One cannot support a family without understanding how they are impacted by the community in which they live. One cannot understand a community without examining the impact of the values and policies of the larger society on it. The ecological context in which families operate is critical to programs' efforts to support families.

4. **Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents' understanding of child development and of their children's unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and communities traditions and mores.**

   Many things impact a parent's child rearing beliefs and practices—any attempts to affect these beliefs and practices must work on multiple levels.

5. **Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of children.**

   Supports and resources for families should not replace the natural family structure, but strengthen it and build its capacity.

6. **The developmental processes that make up parenthood and family life create needs that are unique to each stage in the life span.**

   We each go through a process of lifelong development that needs to be supported with developmental opportunities at all stages of the life span. In addition, the developmental stages of each family member contributes uniquely to family functioning and process at different stages of family development.

7. **Families are empowered when they have access to information and other resources and take action to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities.**

   When provided with knowledge and the resources to act on that knowledge, families will have the power to make positive life decisions for their members and to make a contribution to their neighborhoods.

Principles of Family Support Practice

While the premises reflect a general worldview, the principles of family support practice guide how practitioners work on a day-to-day basis. They capture how family support programs operate, what they stand for, and, most importantly, their relationship with the families who participate in them.

1. **Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.**

2. **Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.**

3. **Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.**

4. **Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.**

5. **Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.**

6. **Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.**

7. **Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development**

8. **Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.**

9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

The principles of family support affect all aspects of program development and operation, not just front-line practice. Family support programs model these principles in everything they do, from strategic planning to evaluation.

The Guidelines

Organized into five themes, the guidelines show how family support centers put the principles of family support practice into action.

1. **Relationship Building** (Principle 1)
   - Programs create a family-friendly environment.
   - Family support practitioners seek to understand family members' values and perspectives.
   - Family support practitioners and families develop collaborative partnerships.
   - Family support practitioners demonstrate positive, responsive caring toward the families with whom they work.
   - Family support practitioners communicate responsibly and effectively with families.

2. **Enhancing Family Capacity** (Principles 2 and 3)
   - Family support practitioners develop with family members a full understanding of the family's strengths.
   - Programs create opportunities for parents—both fathers and mothers—to enhance the parent-child relationship.
   - When family members express a desire to resolve problems or to change something about their lives, practitioners work with them to develop a realistic plan of action that is tailored to their strengths, needs, priorities, and resources and support them during the process of implementing that plan.
   - Programs approach parents as significant resources for each other and for the program.

3. **Affirming Diversity** (Principle 4)
   - Programs support and affirm expressions of cultural and linguistic identity.
   - Programs work with families to combat racist attitudes (and other attitudes that promote hate) and to promote the development of positive cultural, ethnic, and racial identities among children.
   - Programs strengthen staff and families' ability to relate to those who are different from themselves.
   - Programs help families to understand and negotiate the dominant culture and language of the United States.
   - Hiring policies and training opportunities reflect the program's priority on affirming diversity.

4. **Programs in Communities** (Principles 5, 6 and 7)
   - Programs facilitate a sense of belonging and connection to the community among program participants.
   - Programs identify and develop networks of support in the community that are available to participants.
   - Programs respond to community issues and engage families as partners in the process.
   - Programs work to develop a coordinated response to community needs.

5. **Program Planning, Governance and Administration** (Principles 8 and 9)
   - All staff work as a team, modeling respectful relationships of equality.
   - Supervision and mentorship enable staff members to learn from each other.
   - Program planning and implementation continually respond to the norms and concerns of the communities and families served.
   - The family support program creates a governance structure that institutionalizes its mission and vision and ensures its fiscal health.
   - Through their policies and practices, programs promote equality among different cultural groups.
   - Program evaluation is a collaborative, ongoing process that includes input from staff, families, program administrators, and community members.

In this manual, the specific work of starting and operating a family support center is tied to these premises, principles, and guidelines, which represent the practices used by centers across the nation to strengthen and support families. They are cited throughout the manual, and form the foundation for all of its content.

What Do Family Support Centers Do?

Family support centers perform four main functions in order to strengthen and support families in their communities. These functions take many different forms, because each center responds to the unique needs and challenges of its home community and its participants.

Build Families' Strengths and Capacity

Family support centers provide an environment where families recognize their strengths and have opportunities to act upon them. Families from all backgrounds need support at different times, whether it is in helping a parent to toilet train a child, aiding an adult in learning to care for an elderly parent, or teaching a parent about adolescent development so that he or she is prepared for the teenage years. All activities build on participants' own knowledge and skills.

For a family to seek to broaden its knowledge and skills in family life is seen as a sign of strength. In the family support model, families are vital resources for themselves, for programs, for centers, and for their communities. Families are encouraged to share their wisdom with others so that staff members and other families may benefit from their expertise. Family capacity is built through education and by offering services such as day care that can free up a parent's time for one-on-one time with a particular child or spouse, for employment, or for education. Grandparents or elderly participants may act as role models and teachers for young participants. Opportunities are available for parent education, adult education, volunteering, and referral to other community resources.

Serve as Hubs for Community Building

At a local level, community building is a natural outgrowth of other family supportive practices and an intentional effort by staff to encourage mutual support and self-help. Parents and other family members make contacts with others in the community in an atmosphere that calls forth people's strengths and abilities and that emphasizes people's connection to one another. Staff familiarity with participants' shared interests facilitates these contacts. Participants create a new sense of community and mutual support within their own ranks as people living in a shared neighborhood and as people desiring the best for their families' lives. These feelings can lead participants to organize recreational groups, tenants' associations, block clubs, reading classes or babysitters-on-call. Support networks naturally form through these positive social interactions, and participants begin associations outside of the center. Being able to rely on peers for support creates an interdependence that can decrease a family's reliance on public and/or formal supports. This sense of collective experience and mutual action capabilities sets the stage for further self-advocacy in the community and in larger policy arenas.

Work for Social Change

Family support centers have historically been involved in working for social change because the influences of the wider society have a profound influence on the lives of center participants. Centers must address issues such as housing, childcare, school reform, the minimum wage, family-friendly work policies, and other systemic issues that affect the lives of families. In keeping with family support's emphasis on a person's whole social environment, centers have become involved in advocacy with and for participants.

Family support centers engage in and involve families in numerous advocacy activities, including writing letters to local, state, and national representatives on relevant legislation; lobbying representatives and local officials for more family-supportive programs; and protesting unfair treatment of families. Family support programs also participate in state task forces. For example, during welfare reform, many have worked to ensure that regulations issuing from federal legislation are in the best interests of families. Advocacy efforts are excellent opportunities to build the capacity of disempowered and/or disconnected populations to act in their own interests; they also are necessary, given centers' and participants' interconnection with a larger system. Above all, family support centers encourage program participants to engage in advocacy activities and support them in those efforts. They also emphasize the importance of voting and engaging in civic activities.

Provide Access to Resources Without Stigma

Family centers are places where everyone is welcome. They serve people of all different economic levels and families of all colors, shapes, and sizes. Family centers are also places with broad agendas, providing a range of services from knitting groups for grandmothers, to midnight basketball for youth, to preschool education and day care. Since these places seek to empower families and to work with them as partners, family centers are nonstigmatizing places to access community resources. Everybody needs support, whether that means day care or cash transfers or parenting classes, and at family centers are treated with respect and open arms. The nature of the staff-participant relationship and the universally available programs provide a base for working with families that traditional, deficit-based models do not have. The community built by these centers recognizes the nature of the social environment in which families exist and thus does not pigeonhole them in ways that stigmatize them or restrain them from accessing the resources they need.

Family support centers act as access points for community resources in many ways. First, centers have resources in-house for families, such as parent education, child development activities, employment training, and mutual support groups. Second, centers provide referrals for the family to other community agencies. Third, if the family is having difficulty in accessing resources at another agency, staff act as advocates to help the family secure needed resources. Fourth, the informal networks formed by families at the center could give them access to things not otherwise available to them, such as a personal referral to a doctor, an employer, or a babysitter.

As they perform these functions, family support centers respond to the strengths and needs of the families and communities they serve. Centers may devote more or fewer resources to specific functions based on those strengths and needs. Balancing the need to do both systems work (community building and advocacy functions) and microlevel work (taking care of day-to-day programmatic needs) can be challenging, but with participant and staff support for decisions, this balance can be achieved.

Why Are Family Support Centers Needed?

Families throughout history have helped one another. Family support centers facilitate these exchanges and provide additional information and support to these natural helping relationships. In recent years, however, families' needs for support have simultaneously changed and (in some cases) increased. The combination of these trends has made family support centers more needed for a number of reasons.

All Issues Are Family Issues

Families are one of the most important resources that any individual has—a parent's involvement in a child's education increases the child's chances of succeeding in school, and literacy programs that work with both parents and children tend to have a greater impact than those for children or adults only. Attempts to impact individuals that do not draw on the strength of their families are overlooking an important resource. Also, what affects one family member does affects the other members of the family. For example, a mother's drug use affects her children, and a child's involvement in a youth group can serve as a model for the child's siblings. Families are interconnected units, and efforts to serve them must take into account their composition and dynamics and work with them as a whole.

Prevention/Promotion Works

Family support is about investing in the promotion of the positive things that families want for their children. In the long term, family support is a societal investment in the creation of happy, healthy, productive citizens. This investment not only has an impact on the families who participate in services, it has a secondary impact on us all. Family support prevents social problems. Research shows that by investing in positive outcomes for children and families, family support programs also, over the long-term, can lead to (Family Support America 1996, 26–28)

- fewer teenage pregnancies
- less juvenile delinquency
- improved behavior and performance of children at school
- fewer incidents of child abuse and neglect
- more families moving from welfare to work
- increased self-confidence, knowledge of child development, and parenting skills among parents

- greater educational attainment among parents

Through these kinds of results family support allows us as a society to invest in the development of our citizenry rather than putting our money into more prisons, foster homes, and welfare checks. This has a tremendous effect on our overall productivity as a society and on the ability of those receiving family support services to contribute to us as a nation.

Parenting Is Demanding

Parenting is one of life's more enriching and complex endeavors. For most people, parenthood is a lifelong responsibility undertaken with little or no formal support or training. Over the past several decades, the need for parent education and support services has risen dramatically as changing family conditions have resulted in a loss of traditional social supports for families. Family mobility, divorce and separation, families headed by two parents who work outside the home, and social isolation have led parents to seek out other sources of support for the very important job of raising children (Family Support America 1996, 19).

Parent education services increase parents' confidence and competence in their parenting abilities and help them maximize their roles as educators of their children. Parent education services provide access to child development information and offer opportunities to acquire parenting skills that will help them raise healthy, happy, and productive children. While parenting is very much a trial and error process, there is a basic core of knowledge and skills that can make the job easier and yield important results for both parent and child.

Families Need a Supportive Environment

Only a few decades ago, America's families lived in neighborhoods with their extended families and friends—communities served by religious and volunteer organizations. They received information, advice, help, and support from these networks and from schools, businesses, parks, recreational facilities, and transportation systems. Now, young families are less likely to live near their extended families, and the old rhythms of neighborhood life have been interrupted by the varied work schedules of a greater number of working parents. It is now difficult for parents to connect with other parents, to support each other, and to build friendships. (Carnegie Task Force 1994, 16)

One of the most important aspects of family support centers is not really a formal service—rather, it is the opportunity parents are offered to come and meet other neighborhood parents, to learn from each other, and to provide one another with support separate from the formal systems of care established by the center or other agencies.

Families Are Under Increasing Stress

Parents increasingly are feeling overwhelmed as they try to balance work and family life. Forty-two percent of workers in the United States feel "used up" at the end of the work day, and forty percent feel so tired in the morning that it is hard to get up and face another day at work. Seventeen percent of parents with children under age 15 experience "a lot" or "quite a lot" of conflict balancing work, family, and personal life, while another 45 percent experience some conflict. (Kagan and Weissbourd 1994, 115)

Family support centers help parents relieve stress through recreation programs, respite programs, and childcare (offered on site or by another entity) during work hours. In addition, life- and parenting-skills programs can help parents cope with stress through time management, skills in balancing stress from work with the demands at home, and so on.

It takes two wage earners to bring home the equivalent of what one earned 30 years ago. In 82 percent of the families earning $25,000 to $50,000 in 1995, both partners worked to achieve this level of income. In 69 percent of the families earning $50,000 or more, both husband and wife worked. *(Chicago Tribune)* Centers may offer job training programs or other educational opportunities that can help parents advance in their careers, bring home a family wage, and be more satisfied with the work they do.

It Can Be Difficult for Families to Access Services

Our service delivery system is dispersed and often complicated. Accessing services such as childcare or health care can be difficult when one doesn't have access to information on the quality of different services or where those services are located. In addition, the distance one must travel to access services can be great. Because of complicated eligibility rules, or because no one has given them the information they need, families may be unaware that they qualify for certain programs. The public health insurance system provides one example of where this can happen.

In many states (Children's Defense Fund 1998, 3–4)

- different children in a single family can be in different insurance programs with different health plans, based solely on their age
- a change in family income can move a child from one program to another, bouncing from one doctor to the next
- parents must make complex calculations to determine the program for which their children qualify so that they can apply to the right agency
- children denied coverage under a non-Medicaid program because of likely Medicaid eligibility can easily drop out of the application process when their parents are presented with long, complex forms and burdensome paperwork requirements

The insurance system is just one example of the complex service systems many families deal with on a day-to-day basis. Having a family support center as a consistent place where one can go to get information on such services can lessen the burden of trying to keep up with constantly evolving information. A family support center can also provide referrals to agencies where they know families will be treated well. Sometimes, the family support center will be able to offer diverse services on site. Families can obtain information from family support centers in a comfortable setting where they are recognized and respected.

Moving Toward a Family Support Approach

Depending on their particular circumstances, families need a variety of different services and can call upon a variety of internal and external strengths and resources. Sometimes, family members need crisis intervention and/or specialized, targeted services. However, all families need the preventative and promotion services that are available to the community at large. Family support emphasizes these types of services.

Family support services are a new way to interact with families.

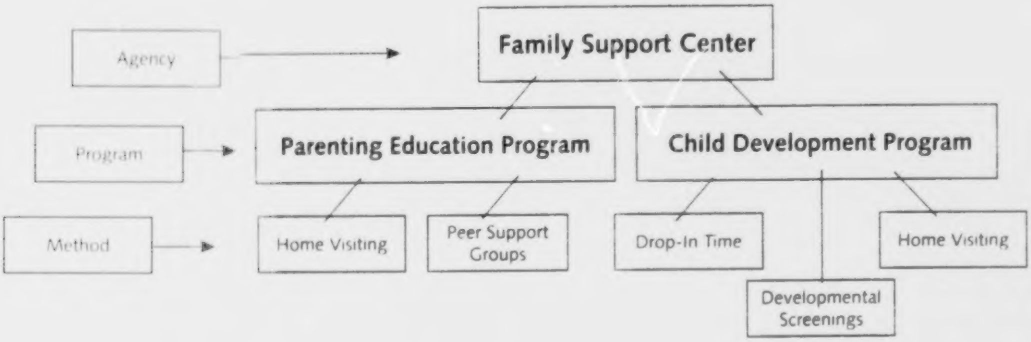
- Family support agencies often strive to arrange comprehensive services on site; when this is not possible, linkages are established with other local service providers and informal support networks so that families will experience a continuum of support when accessing resources. The goal is that no individual or family fall through the cracks.
- Because family support utilizes informal networks of support, it can avoid some regulations about services and information, making resources more accessible and less intimidating.
- The strengths of families are emphasized and built upon. The potential of each family to benefit itself, the program, and the community is explored and developed. Family support services build on families' strengths in the present in order to promote their well-being in the future.

Family support offers a means for us to make the following shifts in the programs, services, and systems that affect children and families (Family Support America 1996, 24):

From	To
Intervention after crises occur and needs intensify	Helping prevent crises by meeting needs early
Offering only specific services or treatments	Helping meet basic needs; providing special services and referrals
Services dictated by program and funding sources	Responding flexibly to family and community needs
Focusing on individuals	Focusing on families
Emphasizing family deficits	Building on family strengths
Having strict eligibility requirements	Reaching out to families
Having rigid office hours	Offering drop-in services
Having waiting lists	Responding quickly to needs
Office-based services	Offering services in families' homes, or in homelike centers

Final Note on Language

In discussions of family support centers, it often is unclear what is meant by terms such as *program*, *service*, *agency*, and *activity*, which at times seem interchangeable. Three specific terms that are used frequently in this book are defined here, so that their meanings can be clear in each instance. These terms—*agency*, *program*, and *method*—each identify a level or stratum within a family support center, as the diagram below indicates. The programs and methods listed are included for purposes of illustration only. Actual programs and methods vary from center to center.


Agency
Family Support Center
Program
Parenting Education Program
Child Development Program
Method
Home Visiting
Peer Support Groups
Drop-In Time
Developmental Screenings
Home Visiting

Agency

The term agency refers to the entire family support center and all aspects of its operations, including its programs and methods (see below) and aspects of its organizational structure and process that are not a part of any one program and method, such as administrative activities. In the book, the terms agency and family support center are interchangeable.

Program

The term program refers to a group of methods (see below) or other agency resources that are motivated by a shared purpose or set of goals and objectives. For example, all methods or resources in the agency that aim to promote positive youth development are part of the agency's youth development program.

Method

The term method refers to the ways (activities, services, etc.) in which the agency carries out a program. Each method may have its own separate objectives, but achievement of these objectives always contributes to the agency's achievement of its program-level goals.

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Chapter 2

Strategic Planning

Family Support Centers

Strategic Planning

This chapter focuses on the process of planning for a family support center. Strategic planning brings together stakeholders from across the community to shape a vision for the community and the mission of what your center will do. Strategic planning does not determine how particular services are structured, but rather creates a broad framework to guide the center's work. In this chapter we discuss the following broad areas in the planning process:

- creating a planning team
- conducting a community assessment
- developing a vision, a mission statement, goals and objectives

A family support center is one approach to improving the lives of children and families in a community. All of the services and activities that a center provides are just pieces of a broader strategy. Therefore, creating a successful center depends on a clear understanding of the daily lives of families in the community and what parents want for their children and themselves. The strategic planning process engages families, agencies, and all partners in a dialogue that shapes the overall vision and direction of the family support center.

Creating a Planning Team

Putting together a planning team is a crucial first step. Those on the planning team not only shape how the center develops but also act as representatives in the broader community. For the center to be truly "owned" by the community, the planning team must be representative of the community and include members from all constituencies or groups within the community. Those involved in the planning process should include

- community residents, especially those who are likely to use center services
- community leaders (including business representatives, elected officials, religious leaders, and other community spokespeople)
- representatives of social service agencies, especially those with which the center is likely to link
- representatives of community organizations (religious organizations, neighborhood groups, etc.)
- anyone in the community who has significant contact with children and families (such as teachers and health care providers)
- funders

The composition of the planning team looks different in each community. The goal is to include individuals who represent constituencies crucial to the success of the center and to reflect the community that the center hopes to serve. The ethnic breakdown, cultural and language diversity, socioeconomic makeup, and any geographical or political diversity in the community to be served should be represented. Because participant ownership of the program and empowerment are so important to the success of family support centers, it is generally recommended that between 33 and 50 percent of strategic planning team members be parents who are part of the population targeted by the center. It is important to include not only parents with previous community planning experience, but also those who are new to the process. A common pitfall is for planners to rely on the same parents repeatedly, which can compromise the extent to which these parents really represent potential participants.

Doing Outreach

Most people whom you approach to participate in planning will want to know how you expect to involve them and what the project is all about. When reaching out to potential planning team members, be prepared to answer to the following questions:

- What is a family support center?
- What is family support?
- What type of time commitment will be expected of planning team members (how many meetings, for how long, how much time outside of meetings)?
- Why am I being contacted?

Getting community residents involved may be the most difficult and most important part of constructing a planning team. The following steps can help encourage resident participation:

- **Identify a few local stakeholders who have close ties to the community and are willing to initiate outreach to residents.** (These are likely to be people who live, work, or have grown up in the community.)

- **Conduct a series of discussions among groups of four or five residents to explain the initiative and outline how they can be involved in planning.** Emphasize the role of residents as experts on the community's well-being and distribute a description of the initiative. It is important to use the meetings as a way to invite residents into the planning process without treating them as the "chosen few." Go to where community members already gather.

- **Conduct a meeting for all community members who show interest in being on the planning team.** Give those who attend an outline of proposed activities that will be undertaken by the planning committee, a schedule of meetings, and a timeline for the work. The meeting should offer residents an opportunity to get to know one another and discuss their views of the community and its current systems of sup-

Roles for Community Residents

There are numerous ways for community residents to be involved in strategic planning efforts. When speaking with residents about their possible involvement, have prepared a short list of possible activities. This list may include

- outreach to other community residents
- designing or leading focus groups
- designing or conducting interviews
- designing or disseminating surveys
- coordinating meetings
- compiling or analyzing data

After presenting these, be sure to ask whether there are any roles that potential participants would like to play that have not been listed. Also be sure that these roles are available to residents on a flexible time commitment basis.

How Our Center Does It

West Side Family Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The West Side Family Center, a family support center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, recommends looking in the following places for local leaders:

- citizens' meetings
- PTO's
- booster clubs
- churches, synagogues, or mosques
- resident associations
- libraries
- empowerment groups

The center also recommends asking service providers and participants for names of people who they think could be leaders, as well as hanging flyers and leaving information at places that you visit.

port for families. The number of other planning partners that attend should be limited so that residents feel free to exchange their own ideas, in their own language, before they meet with the larger planning committee. Planners must make an effort to contact those invited to remind them of the meeting time and place, as well as to reduce barriers that may prevent them from attending.

In planning and carrying out these and subsequent meetings, concerns about childcare, food, reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and transportation should be addressed. Consider providing childcare or asking a potential collaborative partner to provide in-kind services (perhaps offering to do the same for them at some point in the future). Arrange to have a translator present to relay information to parents with another primary language. Offer carpooling services or provide resources for public transportation.

Community Assessment

Community assessment helps the center ensure that services and programs respond to the challenges, concerns, and opportunities that the community and its residents face. It is a systematic way to identify the resources and needs of residents by gathering data, soliciting the perspectives of residents and leaders, and surveying service providers and other community resources. The following pages summarize the community assessment process. A complete kit, *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resource Assessment* is available from Family Support America and includes worksheets, sample instruments, and detailed instructions and tips. Community assessment lays the foundation upon which programs and services are built. It helps community members get the information needed to make decisions and plan for change in their community. A strong community assessment helps ensure that the center

- responds to the unique issues and challenges that children and families in the community face
- builds on of the formal and informal resources in the community
- does not duplicate services and activities that are already available
- is planned in partnership with the community

It is important to structure a community assessment that involves community leaders, service providers, and—most important—residents in gathering information. The goal is to establish joint ownership for the center across these groups, to build trusting relationships among community residents and the center's staff, and to establish the center's credibility in the community. Community assessment helps ensure that the proposed center is both of the community—built from the resources available in the community—and for the community—designed to meet its specific needs.

How is the Community Assessment Different From A Traditional Needs Assessment?

- In community assessments, residents are not simply respondents; they are involved in the design and implementation of the assessment. When residents are involved from the start as partners in community assessment planning and delivery, they can play a part in ensuring that the right questions are asked—questions that are important for their community.

- It focuses not only on needs but also on the assets and resources of the community. This helps ensure that the center is building on the community's strengths and all that residents have to offer.

- It is multifaceted and uses multiple data collection strategies. Community assessment does not only gather statistical data on the community; it is informed by residents' perspectives through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, and gathers information on formal and informal resources in the community. Multiple types of information are gathered from multiple sources, using multiple information collection strategies. This creates a rich, multilayered picture of the community needs, assets, and priorities.

- It is as much about dialogue and consensus building as it is about information gathering. One of the primary purposes of the assessment process is to create a common base of information to be used in the discussion of community issues.

- It is not just about social services. Information is collected on assets and resources in informal organizations, as well as the assets and skills that community residents can bring to the table as individuals.

- It is not academic research but rather a grassroots effort that uses the time and resources available to most communities. Community assessment depends less on the expertise of professional researchers than on the knowledge of community members.

Conducting a Community Assessment

There are four main steps to gathering information on the strengths and needs of a community: getting statistics from secondary sources, gathering residents' perspectives, conducting a resource assessment, and analyzing and prioritizing the information. If carried out systematically, these steps can provide a good general overview of the community to be served.

Get Statistics from Secondary Sources

The first step in the process of a community assessment is to develop a comprehensive profile that presents the well-being of children and families in the community. The community profile is based on quantitative, objective data gathered from a variety of sources including the Census Bureau, state governmental departments, city and county agencies, police and fire departments, and the United Way and other service agencies. The community profile

- acts as a snapshot for program planners and community members, indicating current community conditions
- provides data to support and validate the concerns and priorities of the community as residents have articulated them
- creates baseline data to gauge the effects of the services at a later date

These are the steps for developing a community profile:

1. **Decide what information to collect.** No single set of indicators is right for every community. Choose indicators that reflect the well-being of children and families in the community, can be collected repeatedly over time, and reflect a broad range of input from community members.

2. **Determine what information is already available.** Many communities have existing assessments or data-gathering efforts. This assessment should not duplicate but rather build on these efforts.

3. **Collect data.** Information can be collected from a variety of sources, including the census, schools, service providers, and the local city council or chamber of commerce. All of these institutions collect and keep information on community residents.

4. **Analyze the information.** This involves putting all of the pieces of the assessment together into a coherent picture of the community, looking at trends in the data, and identifying how community data compares with data for similar communities, the surrounding area, or other comparable demographics.

Gather Residents' Perspectives

A quality community assessment combines statistical data on the community with residents' perspectives on life in the community. This helps ensure that your center, before a single service is delivered, is informed by the day-to-day reality of the families who use its services. There are three key aspects of this part of the assessment:

- **Focus-group meetings.** Focus groups are guided discussions among a small group of participants. In this setting the group dynamic provokes and enriches discussion. Ideally, focus groups give your center an opportunity not only to find out what the issues are in the community, but why individuals feel that these issues are important.

- **Interviews with key stakeholders.** Stakeholder interviews are a method of obtaining more in-depth information from community residents and leaders. The goal of an interview is to have a frank discussion of issues affecting residents and their opinions and needs, and to discuss items that people may not be willing to talk about in a focus group. Interviews should be conducted with people in the community who, because they hold certain public positions, have certain professional associations, or have good relationships with families, are particularly important sources of information.

- **Resident surveys.** Surveys collect a broad base of information on the resources, needs, and priorities of community members. The anonymity of surveys often allows people to be more honest about personal issues.

Using a combination of these approaches helps collect information from different groups in the community. It is not necessary to use all three methods or to reach every member of the community. Furthermore, limits on time, money, and individual and collective energy make trying to do so impractical.

The planning team should answer the following questions before beginning to collect information from residents: (1) who is conducting the focus group, survey, or interview; (2) why is this information being gathered; (3) how will the information be used; and (4) how will residents benefit from participating in this process.

Questions used in focus groups, key informant interviews, and resident surveys should be consistent with each other to make comparison possible. If the questions differ significantly from one information-gathering strategy to the next, it is likely that the answers will as well. Such discrepancies make it difficult for members of the planning team to synthesize data that have been gathered using various strategies. In addition, the planning team should make every effort to ensure that the questions are unbiased and should avoid wording questions in a way that would encourage a certain kind of answer.

Conduct a Resource Assessment

Too often community assessments focus only on the needs of the community, ignoring the assets and resources already working to meet those needs. Resource assessment is a crucial step in the community assessment process. It helps the center determine which existing resources in the community it should link with and avoid duplicating services that are already being provided.

Resource assessment should focus on both the informal and formal resources in the community and should provide information that is detailed enough to inform later decisions about service coordination and the integration of formal and informal resources into a comprehensive support system for families.

The resource assessment process has three key parts:

- **Provider surveys.** Provider surveys are used to determine the capacity of the agencies and social service providers in the community. In order to be useful, these surveys should provide detailed information not only on what providers are in the community but also on the type of services that they provide, the number of slots within each service type, and the current utilization of existing services. In addition, one may include organizations not necessarily oriented toward social services (e.g., community development corporations, housing agencies, parks, etc.) if community economic development is an activity that the center wants to participate in.

- **Association surveys.** Association surveys provide information on the capacity of informal organizations in the community—church groups, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and so on. These informal organizations are valuable community resources, but they are overlooked in most traditional assessment processes.

- **Individual capacity surveys.** Individual capacity surveys provide information on the skills and contributions that community residents can bring to the initiative. They provide a way to engage residents not only in defining the issues in their community, but in playing an active role in the community change process.

As with the process of identifying resident perspectives, these three information gathering strategies are meant to be used together to provide a complete picture of the resources and assets of the community.

Analyze and Prioritize the Information

Community assessment is the first step in an ongoing dialogue about the issues facing children and families in the community and the role a family support center can play in addressing these issues. Each of the pieces of the assessment plays a part in this dialogue. The secondary statistics bring together empirical evidence of the community's strengths and weaknesses relative to other communities or parts of the state. Residents' perspectives shed light on the most relevant issues in the community. The resource assessment brings a sense of both the formal services and informal resources already in the community that can be built upon by your center.

So many different types of information cannot be put together through a simple analytic or numerical process. A real understanding of community assessment information can come only from continued dialogue and exploration. First, the groups working on each assessment area must bring to the table their sense of the most pressing issues in the community, based on their analysis of the information they have collected. Each group should present a list of issues, in order of importance, and the reasons each was selected. Based on these recommendations, as the larger assessment team looks at the issue areas, it is important that it determine

- which issue areas appear most consistently on all three lists
- issue areas that appear at the top of one list but not on the other two

It is important to explore why an issue may be coming up in one of the assessment areas but not in others. Maybe it is an issue that people are uncomfortable talking about, so it is coming forward in the profile analysis and in surveys but not in interviews and focus groups. Perhaps it is an issue that is related to one particular segment of the population so it came up in a focus group with this population but not in more general information gathering. Maybe it's someone's pet peeve that came out strongly in a key informant interview. This dialogue will help to determine whether to keep the issue on the table as a central concern rising out of the community assessment process. Simply because it is an issue for only a subgroup of the population does not mean that it needs to be taken off the table. The planning team may decide, for example, that a concern that seems to be common among teen mothers is still something they want to address because this population is very important to the community.

Based on the comparison of the three lists and on the dialogue that follows, the planning team should arrive at a core list of issues. Having identified a core set of issues to address, the planning team must answer the following questions:

- Who is affected by this issue?
- What do we know about the affected population (size, demographic breakdown, age breakdown, etc.)?
- Who is currently providing services to this population (with respect both to the target issue and to unrelated issues)?
- What services or activities are needed to address these issues?
- What is the priority level? Is this an issue to be taken on immediately, in the future, or not at all? The answer to this question will evolve out of the answers to the other five questions and other concerns, such as cost, time needed for implementation, and community-specific needs.

Determining the Target Population

The highest priorities identified during the community assessment process will help determine the target population(s) for the family support center. The center could decide to serve the community at large, focus on providing specialized services for select target populations, or do a combination of both. Some common target populations for family support centers include the following:

- all families in the community
- families who are currently involved with the child welfare system and those who have a high risk for child abuse and neglect
- families who include members with special needs
- families with children aged zero to three
- teen parents

The target population for the family support center and their priority issues are very important in determining the vision, mission, and goals for the center. They determine the impact the center wishes to make on the community as well as the population that the center wishes to involve in its programs.

Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives

As the saying goes, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Knowing where the center is going and having a plan for getting there are critical to the family support center's ability to have a valuable impact on its community.

Creating a Shared Vision and Mission

The vision and mission generally flow from the information collected as part of the community assessment process and in particular are drawn from the center's high-priority issues and target population. Ideally, the vision expresses the community's hopes for the future. The center's mission defines the role the center can play in making this vision happen. The vision and mission statements can be developed at the same time and involve many of the same considerations.

Vision

A vision can be defined as "a dream about what the future will look like" (Georgia Academy 1997, 62). The process of developing a vision requires community members to look into the future and envision a desired state for themselves and their wider community. Creating a vision statement requires the participants to "think big." While there are plenty of parts of the planning process that require detail-oriented thinking, this is not one of them.

- **A vision is an expansive and future-oriented expression of the community's direction**. Clear and compelling visions of the future have great power. It is important to set sights high. An inspiring vision motivates people to act.

- **A shared vision guides the planning of services for the neighborhood or community.** It shapes the means and the ends of desired progress. It also shapes the development of the network of services and supports one chooses for children and families, in that the vision is larger than the family support center.

- **A shared vision statement unifies people.** A vision that is shared by neighborhood residents, school personnel, agency staff, and other stakeholders becomes the reason for working together. The degree to which each person or group is committed to the vision is the measure of the vision's shared quality.

Sample Vision Statements

Vision statements should describe the results that the community wishes to achieve for children, youth, and families.

Example: Children and youth are healthy, safe, and prepared for a productive adulthood.

Example: Families are able to provide a healthy and supportive environment for their children. (Georgia Academy 1997)

Mission

The vision and the mission of a program go hand in hand. A mission statement describes the center's role in making the vision a reality. A mission statement also captures the center's philosophy in a way that clarifies the reasons that the program exists.

While the vision statement is ambitious and expansive, the mission statement is realistic and requires the program to state its own role and responsibility in bringing about the vision. Most mission statements also reflect the program's philosophy and outline the general approach for how change is going to be initiated.

The following illustrates some of the characteristics of mission statements:

The Carole Robertson Center for Learning is a multicultural nonprofit partnership among parents, youth, and community, dedicated to nurturing, supporting, and strengthening family life through quality child, youth and family development programs. The Center serves Chicago families and facilitates community advocacy on child and family issues.

The responsibilities and philosophy of the center are communicated in the following words: *multicultural, partnership, nurturing, supporting and strengthening family life, facilitates, community advocacy.* These words help the center to carve out a unique role, different from all the possible roles that programs, agencies, and other initiatives can play. In this way, the mission statement clarifies the roles and responsibilities that the center considers to be central to its success. These key phrases also convey some of the basic philosophy of the program.

The Process of Developing a Vision and Mission

As discussed above, the process of developing a vision and mission statement should be inclusive and representative of the community. Ideally, the vision and mission should be developed as part of the planning process, serving to guide all later program planning and activities.

One of the most important steps in the process is to identify the appropriate groups to participate and to identify techniques for soliciting their input. If vision and mission statements are being developed as a continuance of a comprehensive community assessment, the group involved in identifying priority issues for the future program in the community assessment could also be a visioning and mission-creation group. If vision and mission creation is not an outgrowth of an assessment, it may be necessary to structure an outreach process in order to ensure that a broad section of the community participates in the process. In most cases, this process culminates in a community meeting in which a diverse group of people shapes the ultimate vision and mission.

As with many of the activities presented in this manual, the development of a vision and mission statement should be an inclusive process. The term *stakeholder* helps to clarify who should be involved. Any individual or organization that has a clear stake in the activities should be involved. A list of possible stakeholders is presented below.

- past, current, and future participants
- interested community members, including youth and elders
- staff members, including the executive director
- board of directors
- interested representatives of funding sources

As a community seeks to establish a family support center or renew an existing center, it is important to build relationships with families in the community to make visible the families' dreams and wishes. If families desire a center, then they must be involved in the process of articulating the vision for their center from the beginning.

While you may choose not to involve all of these parties in the process, it is important to consider contributions that each might make to your overall success. For example, funders may not have the fullest understanding of your broad mission but may enjoy participating in an inclusive process and becoming more familiar with how your program interacts with the participants and the broader community. The inclusiveness of the process affects the quality of input and sets a tone for the center.

When the vision and mission statements are finished, it is crucial to bring them to life for the staff and participants. Visual displays and other reminders of the vision and mission should be uplifting and can serve to focus all stakeholders on their shared purpose.

Orchestrating a Powerful Vision

by Maria Chavez, Ph. D.

Families in a primarily Latino community in Snohomish County, Washington, started the vision and mission statement writing process with an evening celebration in which community members had an opportunity to share their ideas with each other and with staff. After a delicious Thanksgiving dinner, the Latino Parent Trust Coordinator opened the meeting with some inspirational comments. Then families took part in a group activity during which they expressed their wishes for what the Latino Center would be like.

The purpose of this activity was to start a process of forming a vision for the Latino families and the community. The activity was simple but powerful. Each family (including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, and children) worked together to envision a Latino Center. Each family was provided with paper, pencils, and markers, and was asked to draw their center, including all of their dreams for development.

Families were then invited to share their hopes with others. During this time, families expressed their feelings about not being able to make their intelligence visible when language was a barrier. They said, "The center will be a place where our language and culture are respected and used." They also recognized the need to learn basic and advanced English and to study basic skills to help them achieve success in employment and education. They said, "Many of us did not have the opportunity to access formal schooling and we would very much like to improve ourselves."

Families shared their feelings about having to live in apartments, without yards, where they could not run and play games with their children. They felt that "the center should have a big playground and places where families can gather to talk and dream and work together." They also envisioned the center as a focal point for reducing families' isolation—the center would be a place where battered women could be helped and nurtured and where people could seek assistance with the complex immigration laws.

Families shared their vision of Latino health professionals who would minister to their needs, always aware of their language and customs. They said, "We need professionals that share our language so that we can communicate our needs adequately without having to use our children as translators."

The next step called for families to take the expressed dreams to the community and to share them with those who were not able to attend the meeting. They would then bring back to the staff any new ideas they encountered, creating a critical mass of support. Staff would then search for a volunteer architect who could pull all of the ideas together into a representational drawing of the Latino Family Resource Center. The architectural drawing would be exhibited in a central gathering place for all to see.

Families had taken on the task of developing a powerful vision, and slowly, piece by piece, each person and family showed the center of their dreams. Now the vision was owned by people who were going to be directly affected by the decisions that drove that vision, and they would have a role in the enactment of their own dreams. After the meeting, many people gathered to further elaborate on their dreams and to pledge their commitment to the task. It was evident that there were many natural leaders in this group and that they relished taking the next steps.

Goals and Objectives

Defining Our Terms

Before discussing goals, it is important to recognize that different groups use different terms for the same concept. For example, what one group calls goals, others call results or outcomes. Sometimes what one person thinks is an objective, another person thinks is a goal, and so on. It also can be confusing because people use different language depending on their purpose—planning or evaluation (in strategic planning, people often refer to a *future, desired state*, while during evaluation people use *results* or *outcomes* to refer to how well a goal was achieved and *indicators* to refer to the measure of how well an objective was achieved). People also may refer to different goal levels, such as agency goals versus program goals. Individual programs within the agency may also have either one goal or multiple goals. In any case, it is important to reach group consensus regarding use of language, whatever terms are chosen, and to be *consistent* in using those terms.

Goals

Goals (sometimes referred to as outcomes or results) can be defined as the desired effects of a center or what the center is aiming for. Most people have a very natural and accurate feel for what goals are and have a relatively easy time developing them. Goals should be consistent with the mission of the program and should help provide direction for achieving that mission. In contrast to objectives, which are discussed in the next section, goals are not specifically measurable, nor do they describe a time frame for their achievement.

Examples of goal statements include

- to improve children's readiness for school
- to promote the health of women during and after pregnancy
- to increase the employability of young parents

Each of these goals helps guide the activities of the center and helps it achieve its mission.

Guidelines for Creating Goals

Goals focus on either
- **reducing the gap between the desired state of affairs and what exists, or**
- **maintaining the status quo in the face of an anticipated decline or deterioration.**

(Rossi and Freeman 1993)

Goals should
- **be ambitious**
- **be idealistic**
- **be consistent with agency mission**
- **state the expected outcome**

(Kettner, Moroney, and Martin 1990)

Goals statements include
- **the nature of the problem**
- **the target population**
- **the general direction of anticipated change**
- **the means for affecting change**

(Gabor and Grinnell 1994)

After the planning team has set goals, they form objectives in order to quantify and qualify the center's methods of achieving those goals.

Objectives

Objectives often are referred to as the operationalization of goals—they break goals down into activities and smaller outcomes that are concrete and measurable. As with goals, there are many opinions as to what the key characteristics of objectives should be. Some of these standards are presented in the text box below.

Objectives are of two main kinds, *process objectives* and *outcome objectives*. Process objectives refer to the way in which goals are going to be achieved. Process objectives are helpful as markers of the steps toward success. If you are not successful in meeting process objectives, it is unlikely that outcome objectives will be achieved. Outcome objectives, on the other hand, focus specifically on the achievement of results. *How will program participants' knowledge, attitudes, or behavior change as a result of participating in the program?* Attaching both process and outcome objectives to each goal helps ensure success.

Using the goal of improving children's readiness for school, mentioned above, some corresponding objectives will now be explored.

The following would be process objectives:

- to provide 30 parents with parent education classes on the transition to school over the course of the next three months
- to provide 100 families with books and family activities in parent/child reading by the end of the academic year

The following would be outcome objectives:

- Upon completion of the program, 70% of participants will improve their scores on a prekindergarten readiness test by 10 percent.
- Within four months of the start of the program, 60% of participants will demonstrate familiarity and comfort with books.

Guidelines for Creating Objectives

Objectives should

- use active verbs
- state only one purpose
- specify a single end-product
- specify the expected time of achievement

(Rossi & Freeman 1993)

- be clear
- have a time frame for accomplishment
- specify a target of change
- specify results to be achieved
- state the criteria by which results will be documented, monitored, or measured

(Kettner, Moroney, & Martin 1990)

- be meaningful
- be specific
- be measurable
- be directional

(Gabor & Grinnell 1994)

Creating Goals and Objectives

In the process of setting goals and objectives the team planning the family support center decides which actions and outcomes are likely to result in the achievement of their mission. As in the process of creating the vision and mission, stakeholders who will be affected by the decisions made should be involved in creating goals and objectives. Stakeholders include potential participants, potential staff members, program administrators, and perhaps an evaluation consultant.

- Potential participants ensure that the goals and objectives chosen are meaningful to them.
- Potential staff members establish ownership over the ends that they are trying to accomplish.
- Administrators see that goals and objectives are manageable and supported by the organization's resources.

An evaluation consultant who has knowledge of specific guidelines for evaluating family support programs can help the team refine goals and objectives so that they are achievable and measurable.

Program goals and objectives contribute to the development of a *program hypothesis* or *program theory* (Kettner, Moroney, and Martin 1990). This hypothesis or theory lays out planning participants' expectations for cause-and-effect relationships, the relationships between what they plan to do and the results of those actions. A well thought-out program hypothesis provides future evaluators with a point of reference for *what* the program is trying to accomplish and *how* it is trying to produce outcomes. It enables the evaluator to ask not only, "Did the program meet its goals and objectives?" but also, if these goals and objectives were not met, "Did the program implement what was planned?" The program hypothesis is a series of if-then, cause-and-effect statements. While this may seem deficit-oriented, it is a way of getting beyond deficit-based thinking to see things in a strengths-based perspective. To create a program hypothesis, do the following:

- Choose a priority issue or problem identified in the community assessment.
- Brainstorm with planning team members about factors that may contribute to that situation. Be sure to also refer to any existing literature or research on the issue.
- Identify any high-risk groups affected by the issue. This information may come from the community assessment, potential participants' knowledge, or other service providers.
- Determine whether family support programming could have an impact on particular factors that contribute to the issue. (For more information on program content areas and methods, see chapters 3–5.)

The result of this process is an *issue analysis* of the issue confronting the family support center. An example of an issue analysis pertaining to child abuse or neglect is:

1. Child abuse and neglect result from
2. lack of anger management skills and
3. lack of parenting skills and
4. lack of social support
5. in certain groups of high-risk parents (identified by the community assessment and/or through research)
6. who need family support services.

If you turn this analysis on its head, it produces a *program hypothesis:*

1. If family support services are offered,
2. if high-risk parents use them,
3. if they gain social support,
4. if they gain parenting skills, and
5. if they gain anger management skills,
6. then child abuse and neglect will be prevented.

From the program hypothesis, planners gain the program goals and objectives. The "then" statement (6) contains the overall goal: preventing child abuse and neglect. The factors, or steps, that contribute to the attainment of this goal (3–5) then suggest the objectives. As a result, the outcome objectives could be stated as follows, with percentages set at a number deemed appropriate by planning participants.

- Upon completion of the program, 50% of the parents will report a gain in sources of positive social support.
- Upon completion of the program, 70% of all parents will demonstrate improved parenting skills.
- Upon completion of the program, 60% of all participants will demonstrate improved anger management skills.

These objectives state the participant outcomes of this program. Below is a different example of this process.

You may have noticed that that there is room for debate about how the outcomes of certain objectives (e.g., improved parenting skills) should be measured. The next part of the process is for planning team members to engage in a discussion about what will count as an indication that the objectives have been achieved. That is, they must agree to indicators. This discussion could necessitate agreement on how outcomes are to be measured (e.g., tests to be used), when outcomes will be measured (e.g., periodically during the program or only at program completion), and how that measurement will occur (who will be responsible for making it). This process is closely tied to program evaluation, which will be covered in chapter 6.

Identified Issue Area	**Contributing Factors**	**Issue Analysis**	**Program Hypothesis**
School readiness	• Parent involvement in school activities • Parent literacy • Children have social skills relevant to school (i.e., sitting still, waiting their turn, sharing, etc.) • Secure emotional bond between parents and children • Positive social interactions with other children • Opportunities for children and parents to engage in literacy activities together **Prioritized Factors** 1. Parent involvement in school activities 2. Parent literacy 3. Opportunities for children and parents to engage in literacy activities together	(1) School readiness results from (2) parent involvement in school activities, (3) parent literacy, and (4) opportunities for children and parents to engage in literacy activities together (5) for all children who participate with their parents (6) who can benefit from a family literacy program.	(1) If family literacy services are offered, (2) if children participate with their parents, (3) if opportunities exist for children and parents to engage in literacy activities together, (4) if parents improve their literacy, and (5) if parents are involved in school activities, (6) then there will be an increase in school readiness in participants.

Implementation Plan

Activities, Benchmarks, and Timelines

During this part of the planning process, the planning team creates specific *activities* that enable the center to achieve each goal and objective. These include both the direct service activities of frontline staff and activities that support and sustain the center. Examples of the latter include but are not limited to

- establishing ways to monitor center and participant progress (see chapter 6)
- addressing staffing issues (when and who to hire; see chapter 8, volume II)
- securing funding and a budget for the program (see chapters 10 and 11, volume II)
- creating an organizational and governance structure (see chapter 12, volume II)
- recruiting participants for the program (both initially and as the program participants "turn over"; see chapter 16, volume III)

Rather than waiting until an objective is supposed to have been attained to measure whether or not it was achieved, programs set *benchmarks* that indicate smaller steps toward each objective. Doing this helps ensure that the center remains on-target with ultimate goals and that goals and objectives may be modified if they are set unrealistically high. Consider having a continuous feedback loop through which participants' attainments are assessed along the way rather than only at the time of program evaluation. This issue is closely tied with determining *indicators*, addressed in the previous section.

Activities and benchmarks should then be set up along a *timeline*, the achievement of program objectives being at the end of the timeline, with activities and benchmarks leading from the beginning of the program to the end. To establish benchmarks, think of how you would measure success along the way.

Below is a chart that can help you track activities that need to get done, when they need to be accomplished, the persons responsible for carrying them out, and ways for monitoring their completion.

Activity	Timeline for Completion	Who is Responsible	Ways to Measure Progress/ Completion

As you and your planning team go through the processes reviewed in this chapter, you gradually develop a comprehensive and detailed plan for program implementation driven by the vision and mission the community chose for your family supper center. Over time, the staff and participants may want to return to various points in the strategic planning process to revisit and clarify the direction of your center.

Resources

PUBLICATIONS

Designing and Managing Programs: An Effectiveness-based Approach
By P. Kettner, R. Moroney, and L. Martin. 1990. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.

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By B. Samuels, N. Ahsan, & J. Garcia. 1995. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Planning for Change Workbook
Community Capacity Development Series. 1997. Atlanta, Ga.: Georgia Academy, Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families, and The Family Connection.

Prevention: The Critical Need
By J. Pransky. 1991. Springfield, Mo.: Burrell Foundation.

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Chapter 3

Programs: Developing the Core

Family Support Centers

Programs: Developing the Core

This chapter is the first of two on content areas for family support center services. Because each center is designed to meet the specific needs of families in its community and its specific goals and objectives, no two look alike or have exactly the same services. There are, however, a few core areas of work that are consistent across many, if not most, family support centers. These core service areas help centers fulfill three central functions: (1) they promote optimal child development, (2) they strengthen child and parent bonds, and (3) they help families access the supports they need—both through formal service systems and through informal, peer-to-peer structures. In this chapter, we discuss the following categories of core services:

- parent education
- child development
- life skills
- informal network building
- advocacy
- information and referral

For each category, the following are provided:

- a definition and a rationale for why family support centers include this service
- a framework for how to develop programming
- an overview of information and resources
- examples of how the services have been implemented

How these services are delivered varies, as does how they relate to the larger body of services that the center provides. It is important to structure these services in a way that maximizes the chances for meeting your goals and objectives. In chapter 5, we discuss service delivery methods that can be used across these content areas.

Parent Education

The sharing of information, strategies, and tools to help parents in the hard job of being parents has always been an important part of family support. As discussed in chapter 1, family support centers have evolved from social and demographic changes in American society. One of the impacts of these changes has been that some of the traditional ways people learn about parenting—through extended family networks, networks of neighbors, faith communities, family members living close by—are not as common as they once were. In addition, new research on child development, brain and neural development, and learning patterns means that there is a great amount of information available to parents that was not available before.

There are many, many resources on parenting issues. At any one time, there are at least 1,500 books on parenting topics in print. In addition, there are web sites, videotapes, cable TV shows, pamphlets and posters, and classes and lectures. Family support programs sort through many of the resources to get parents the information they need and want about parenting and child development.

No one way of providing information is the "right way." Parents have different learning styles and time constraints. However, whatever strategy is chosen, a program should keep the following principles in mind:

- Parents are the experts about their own children. Effective parent education works in partnership with parents by bringing information and resources that can help enhance the parents' expertise.
- Culture contributes to parenting styles, and transmission of culture is an important aspect of parenting. Effective parenting education takes into account and builds on the cultural values of participating parents and families. (For a more detailed discussion on how to incorporate issues of culture into parenting education please see chapter 15).
- Parenting education is about imparting information as well as strengthening skills and capacities. Strong parent education programs provide opportunities for parents to practice what they learn and think through how it impacts their everyday parenting.
- Parenting does not equal mothering. Although mothers are often thought of as, and so often are, the primary caretakers of children, it is important to think about and reach out to fathers and nontraditional caretakers (grandparents, siblings, and other relatives, for example) when designing and developing parenting education programs.
- All parenting education resources should be appropriate to the parents in the program and community. Ask yourself:

    - Is the information compatible with good child development practice?
    - Will parents see people like themselves represented in the pictures?
    - Will the information be clear and understandable?
    - Will parents relate to how it is written, not feeling that it's either condescending or too abstract?
    - Are the materials available in the language that most of the parents speak?
    - Does the information presented relate to the questions parents want to have answered?

- Effective parent education helps parents recognize how much they already know and how much they already do.
- Effective parent education, when offered in groups, promotes sharing and opportunities for parents to be resources for each other, and facilitates mutual learning and teaching.

Ways to Convey Information on Parenting

- **Create an environment in which parents can learn from each other.** Other parents are often the most important experts available. One of the ways in which family support centers convey parenting information is by creating structured opportunities for parents to share parenting experiences, learn from each other, and problem solve together. This can be through (1) formalized mentor pairings between two parents, or even two families; (2) informal parenting coffee hours or discussion groups; or (3) just encouraging parents to talk about common parenting concerns during drop-in times, family nights, and other informal activities.

How Our Center Does It

West Side Family Center
St. Paul, Minnesota

Through West Side and its partner organizations, Neighborhood House and Jane Addams School for Democracy, parents can choose among a variety of six parent groups offered in English, Spanish, or Hmong. The groups serve as culturally relevant, mutual support and education for parents. "Monday Night Live!" is West Side's newest program for parents and their children. Developed by two West Side parents, the program runs for six-week sessions with transportation, childcare, and dinner provided for families. During the evening, children can participate in classes such as dance and Tae Kwon Do, parents can take classes in infant care and cooking, and there are also numerous classes such as reading, crafts, and computers which parents and their children can take together. Another creative feature of the program is the parent "chat room," which is literally a room set aside as a place for parents to talk, share experiences, and offer support.

- **Provide parenting education classes.** Parenting education classes are one of the most common ways that family support centers provide information on parenting and child development. Parenting education classes can be structured in different ways. They can be provided on an as-needed basis on issues that are of immediate interest to parents, in a more structured way using a standard curriculum and schedule, or in some combination of the two. Many parent educators advise that before you choose a parent education curriculum or other parenting resources, you draw on parents' opinions. Consider establishing a parent review committee to look over materials before they are incorporated into programming. Most parent educators use a combination of resources and rarely follow one curriculum to the letter. Parent educators usually view themselves as facilitators – presenting information and facilitating discussion. For more information on structuring classes and choosing and developing curricula, see chapter 5.

- **Make materials on parenting issues available to parents through lending libraries and resource rooms.** As mentioned above, there are literally thousands of books and tapes for parents available. Create a lending library at the center so parents can check out books, tapes, and videos on parenting to take home. This will provide them with a resource they can use at their own pace. Review books and other resources before buying them—check them out from the local library to see if they meet participants' needs. Member newsletters of national early childhood associations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Parent Education Network, or Zero to Three often provide book reviews that can serve as a guide for this type of resource as well.

  Many of these organizations also publish free fact sheets, posters, and charts on child development that you can order in bulk and make available to parents in your program. There are also hundreds of parenting education videotapes to choose from. Videotapes are advantageous because parents can check them out and use them in their own homes—this is particularly important with parents who are visual learners or whose literacy skills are low. Make sure that resources are available in the native languages of the parents in your community.

- **Use guest speakers and field trips as opportunities for parents to learn about parenting from "experts."** Every community is filled with experts on children and parenting—a local pediatrician, a school nurse, the nutritionist at the hospital, the child development instructor at the local community college, a school teacher, or even a firefighter or police officer. These individuals can serve as important resources to local family support centers because they have specialized knowledge to convey. Additionally, the act of having an outside speaker come in, or going on a field trip, can make the information stand out and seem more important. When identifying outside speakers, ensure that the speaker conveys the same family-supportive philosophy as the center. Choose a speaker who will be nonjudgmental and respectful, has an understanding of the issues that parents bring to the table, and encourages dialogue and questions. Provide speakers with background on the center, the families who participate, and the community being served. Also provide opportunities for parents to identify topics and help choose outside speakers.

- **Model effective parenting skills.** Times when parents, children, and family support workers are interacting together can be used to model effective parenting skills. For example, parent/child activities can be used as an opportunity for workers to help parents experiment with different ways of interacting with their children that they can then practice at home. By modeling ways of talking, listening, and interacting with children—and explaining what they are doing and why—staff members can help parents not only understand new theories or strategies for parenting, but to see these theories and strategies in action.

- **Use practical resources and parent gifts as ways to communicate with parents about parenting.** There are all kinds of fun resources for parents that are practical and provide important parenting information as well. Provide parents with growth charts to measure their children's height that have child development milestones on them. Help each parent create a baby book with space for pictures of his or her child at different ages and information about activities appropriate for each age. Give parents calendars with child development facts printed on each month. These tools can be created with the parents in the program or can be accessed through other organizations. Similarly, toy-making workshops not only provide an opportunity for parents to make fun things for their children, but also provide a chance to learn about how their children learn, and to engage them in play that helps them to learn.

How Our Center Does It

The Avance Family Support and Education Program

Avance has statewide headquarters in San Antonio, Texas. Through Avance's toy-making classes, parents learn how to make approximately 30 toys (books, puzzles, dolls, puppets, etc.) out of inexpensive materials to stimulate their children's learning environment. For the parents, the completion of the toys builds self-confidence and pride. For the children, toy-making signifies that their parents care about them and provides an opportunity to be the center of their parents' attention and have fun with them. As part of the program, Avance staff also go into each family's home twice a month to videotape the parent and child playing with a toy made in the toy-making class. In the parenting class, parents review each other's videotapes. In this way, parents learn lots of ways to play with their children and identify effective approaches.

- **Provide one-on-one home visits.** Home visits are another key strategy for conveying parenting education information. Home visits provide an opportunity for staff to model behavior and practices that help children learn, using objects parents find in their own homes. They also provide opportunities for parents to ask questions and get support in the every day tasks of caring for their children. Chapter 5 provides more in-depth information on how to structure home visiting programs.

- **Be there to answer parents' questions.** Often the most effective form of parenting education is just answering questions. All parents have questions about parenting. Knowing that there is an understanding resource available who can either answer their questions or help them find the answer is important. Staff members who parents are likely to approach with questions should be trained in how to respond. They must be nonjudgmental and send the message that no question is a silly question. They should check their facts before giving a response, and should know that it's all right if they don't know the answer. They should also be able to distinguish clearly between their own opinions and facts.

- **Don't forget fathers and grandparents.** As mentioned earlier, too often parent education is seen as something that is of interest to or only targeted toward mothers. Getting men and grandparents involved in parenting education often takes special outreach and an intentional focus.
  - Make sure that books and materials talk about both fathers and mothers.
  - Include pictures of men and grandparents in any parenting education outreach materials.
  - Schedule special sessions or meetings that are targeted at men and grandparents.
  - Plan some activities that are likely to appeal to men, like a sports night, which can be used to draw fathers in.
  - Have male staff members or fathers who are already involved help to recruit other men.
  - Have grandparents who are already involved help to recruit other seniors.

Topics to Consider for Parent Education

For Parents of Infants

- breast feeding and nutrition
- attachment and communication
- holding and caring for your infant
- infant health and development
- becoming a new parent
- milestones: how your infant grows and develops
- activities you can do with your child
- infant safety, including the dangers of shaking babies
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
- early brain development

For Parents with Young Children

- child health and development
- preparing your child for school
- milestones: how children grow and develop
- nutrition and growth
- early learning strategies
- activities to do with your child
- helping your child understand his or her feelings
- discipline and setting limits

For Parents of School-Aged Children

- working with your child's teacher
- building effective homework skills
- milestones: how children grow and develop
- activities to do with your child
- raising a responsible child
- family meetings and family rules
- problem solving, setting limits, and discipline
- talking with your child about peer pressure
- talking with your child about sex
- talking with your child about drugs and alcohol
- talking with your child about bullies and conflict
- rituals and the transition to adolescence

For Parents of Adolescents

- communicating with your teen
- expectations for responsible school performance
- family problem solving and conflict resolution
- family rules and goal setting
- responsibilities, privileges, and consequences
- helping your child think through what comes after high school
- talking with your child about peer pressure
- talking with your child about sex
- talking with your child about drugs and alcohol
- talking with your teen about adolescence
- activities to do with your child
- keeping home-school communication open

For All Parents

- self-esteem—recognizing your parenting strengths
- communicating your values to your child
- advocating for your child
- discipline and guidance
- setting limits
- coping with stress
- working together—family cohesion
- passing on your culture and family history
- building and using your social network

Child Development

Another key element of family support programming has always centered on promoting the healthy growth and development of children. Family support centers work in partnership with parents to provide learning environments where children are cared for, nurtured, stimulated, and supported in their development. Effective child development activities incorporate the most current knowledge about how children grow and develop.

Family support centers work to build parents' understanding, skills, and confidence in utilizing early child development activities that will strengthen the parent/child bond and promote the optimal development of a child. Many focus on child development in the earliest years, especially zero to three, which research shows is critical to a child's healthy development. Researchers have discovered that if critical parts of the brain are not stimulated during these early years, they may remain undeveloped forever. Simple activities—reading to children, holding them, helping them play—can help to provide this important early stimulation. Family support centers focusing on early childhood provide rich and stimulating environments that compliment the home environment and help children get the experiences they need to develop optimally.

Other family support centers focus on children's growth and development for a longer period. For some programs, this is zero to six, while others focus on children's developmental needs beyond this. Regardless, all programs need to be responsive and inclusive of all family members and family structures. This means including older children, extended kin, and family members, even if they are not the primary focus of programmatic activities. In this chapter we focus on a framework for child development that extends through children's life cycle.

Content Areas for Child Development

A renewed interest in the importance of the first few years of life on child health and development, educational attainment, and economic well-being is being fueled by increased research findings that show the first three years of life as the most important and vital for physical brain development. This research suggests that early childhood provides a critical window of opportunity for great gains in cognitive and emotional development. This attention to the early years presents an exciting challenge and opportunity for family support centers. Family support centers provide an ideal location for the provision of early childhood activities that, when coupled with strong family involvement and parent partnership, enhance all aspects of a child's development.

Ten Simple Things that Boost Children's Brain Power

Interaction
Loving touch
Stable relationship
Safe, healthy environment
Self-esteem
Quality childcare
Communication
Play
Music
Reading

McCormick Tribune Foundation

Physical Development

One of the most important things that children do is grow. Not only do they get bigger, their bodies develop and change, and as they grow they develop their coordination and learn new skills. Family support centers can help children grow strong and healthy by

- teaching children healthy habits—by both modeling and explaining healthy nutrition, exercise, and safety habits as a day-to-day part of center programs
- keeping children active and engaged while they are in the center
- engaging young children in specific developmental activities that help them to build their fine and gross motor functions
- providing large spaces and gross motor equipment that most families do not have at home

Cognitive Development

Family support centers serve as important environments where children are provided rich opportunities and experiences that help them develop language skills, basic numerical skills, and early problem-solving and communication skills. Staff members should be knowledgeable about how children learn and should build specific learning opportunities into children's activities. Family support centers should keep the following in mind when developing activities or services to promote children's cognitive development:

- Provide toys and activities that are educational and appropriate to the age group of children playing with them.

- Offer a variety of learning opportunities and methods including recreational activities, small group and individual projects, exploration activities, prereading exercises, math-based activities and games, arts and crafts, science projects, singing, and imagination-enhancing games.
- Make learning fun. Programs and activities should help children establish a positive association with learning and intellectual exploration.

Research is discovering that an individual's level of emotional competency is an important determinant of success in adolescence and adulthood. Emotional competence is a person's level of persistence or self-motivation, ability to cope with stress and manage strong feelings, and ability to empathize and relate to others. Emotionally competent children

- focus on the task at hand
- get along with peers and adults
- are able to delay gratification
- bounce back quickly after stressful experiences

Centers can help to build a young child's emotional competence by structuring children's activities to help them learn important concepts such as sharing and turn taking, empathizing with others, kindness and doing for others, managing anger, and controlling impulses.

Parent/Child Relationships

Researchers point to primary relationships with adults as one of the greatest factors in determining a child's ability to succeed. The relationships and interactions between parent and child in the very first years are proving to have a life-long influence on the child's psychological and neurological development. By offering joint programming for parents and their very young children, centers can focus on strengthening the family unit, fostering a parent's knowledge, skills, and confidence, and supporting a parent in providing a warm and trusting relationship with their children. This enables a child to form a positive self-image and display the confidence, self-control, and ability to relate to others that he or she will need in order to succeed in school and in life. Family support centers reinforce a parent's sensitive and responsive care so that children come to expect positive interactions with adults and hence develop a healthy sense of emotional well-being. By offering consistent nurturing relationships, parent/child interaction, mastery of abilities, and use of social supports, the center helps to ensure children's emotional needs are being met. With a solid emotional base, children will feel empowered and competent to explore and learn.

Developmental Milestones

The chart that begins on the following page provides a summary of developmental accomplishments for children ages 0–8. Centers practicing developmentally appropriate practice keep these milestones in mind when offering children's activities. For instance, knowing that some of the milestones for a 30-month-old child are the ability to paint, hop, and walk up stairs provides staff with important information by which to plan and develop age-appropriate activities for this age group.

Approximate Age	What Children Do	What Children Need
Birth to 3 months	Begin to smile Track people and objects with eyes Prefer faces and bright colors Reach, discover hands and feet Lift head and turn toward sound Cry, but often soothed when held	Protection from physical danger Adequate nutrition Adequate health care (immunization, oral rehydration therapy, hygiene) Motor and sensory stimulation Appropriate language stimulation Responsive, sensitive parenting
4 to 6 months	Smile often Prefer parents and older siblings Repeat actions with interesting results Listen intently, respond when spoken to Laugh, gurgle, imitate sounds Explore hands and feet Put objects in mouth Sit when propped, roll over, scoot, bounce Grasp objects without using thumb	All of the above
7 to 12 months	Remember simple events Identify themselves, body parts, familiar voices Understand own names, other common words Say first meaningful words Explore, bang, shake objects Find hidden objects, put objects in containers Sit alone Creep, pull themselves up to stand, walk May seem shy or upset with strangers	All of the above
1 to 2 years	Imitate adult actions Speak and understand words and ideas Enjoy stories and experimenting with objects Walk steadily, climb stairs, run Assert independence, but prefer familiar people	In addition to the above, support with: Acquiring motor, language, and thinking skills Developing independence Learning self-control

Chart continued on page 46

Approximate Age	What Children Do	What Children Need
1 to 2 years (continued)	Recognize ownership of objects Develop friendships Solve problems Show pride in accomplishments Like to help with tasks Begin pretend play	Opportunities for play and exploration Play with other children Health care must also include deworming
2 to 3 1/2 years	Enjoy learning new skills Learn language rapidly Always on the go Gain control of hands and fingers Are easily frustrated Act more independent, but still dependent Act out familiar scenes	In addition to the above, opportunities to: Make choices Engage in dramatic play Read increasingly complex books Sing favorite songs Work simple puzzles
3 1/2 to 5 years	Have a longer attention span Act silly, boisterous, may use shocking language Talk a lot, ask many questions Want adult things Want to keep art projects Test physical skills and courage with caution Reveal feeling in dramatic play Like to play with friends, do not like to lose Share and take turns sometimes	In addition to the above, opportunities to: Develop fine motor skills Continue expanding language skills by talking, reading, and singing Learn cooperation by helping and sharing Experiment with prewriting and prereading skills
5 to 8 years	Grow curious about people and how the world works Show an increasing interest in numbers, letters, reading, and writing Become more and more interested in final products Gain more confidence in physical skills Use words to express feeling and to cope Like grown-up activities Become more outgoing, play cooperatively	In addition to the above, opportunities to: Develop arithmetic and reading skills Engage in problem solving Practice teamwork Develop sense of personal competency Practice questioning and observing Acquire basic life skills Attend to basic education

Adapted from "Your Child's Growth: Developmental Milestones," American Academy of Pediatrics 2000.

Specific Strategies to Promote Child Development

Childcare

The care that children receive throughout their childhood significantly affects their growth and development. As more and more families contend with having both parents working or are headed by a single working parent, the importance of quality childcare becomes more and more relevant. Childcare providers should be seen not as babysitters, but as partners in ensuring that children and families receive the support they need to be strong and healthy. Because quality childcare has become such an important part of healthy child development, helping families access and identify quality care is an important role of family support centers.

Help parents find quality, family-supportive childcare and before- and after-school care. Often parents turn to their local family support centers as a resource to help them find quality childcare in their community. Helping parents access quality childcare resources is an important role for family support providers because it helps to build the bridges between family support and childcare.

- Create a linkage with the childcare resource and referral agency in your community. Childcare resource and referral agencies maintain databases on childcare providers in the community. They can provide information on local childcare rates and give listings of local providers. To identify your local agency call the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies' Childcare Aware hotline at 800/424-2246.
- Provide information for parents on what to look for in a childcare provider. Make sure not to recommend a particular childcare setting unless at least one staff member has visited the site and observed the childcare worker(s) with children.
- Get to know childcare providers in the community and be informed regarding a variety of options that are available. Identify which providers give quality, family-supportive care and help to link families with those providers.

How Our Center Does It

The Parent Resource Center
Port Washington, New York

The Parent Resource Center (PRC) helps families to access childcare in their community in multiple ways. The PRC's babysitting co-op provides an opportunity for parents to exchange babysitting services and form informal connections. Members meet monthly to discuss co-op issues and to allow parents and children to get to know each other. For families not interested in participating in the formal co-op, the center also provides a babysitting directory which lists caregivers able to sit full- and part-time. This is also a place for parents seeking care to list their names and job requirements. Finally, the center provides drop-off childcare on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and from 6–9 p.m. on the first Friday of the month. The fee is $5.00 per child, per hour, and parents must call a day or two ahead to reserve a block of time. The center sees this as an opportunity for parents to get out and take care of themselves—take a class or a nap, have a quiet dinner, catch a movie, or just relax.

Provide drop-in childcare to families when necessary.
All family support programs should provide on-site childcare so that parents can be involved in center activities and services. Childcare helps to ensure that parents can fully participate in center services without having to worry about finding care for their children—or feeling like they have to divide their attention between their children and the activities they are participating in. When developing on-site care for parents to use while attending center programs, remember the following:

- Review your state and local childcare regulations. The standards for childcare are different when parents are on-site versus drop-off childcare. Below are some guidelines for caregiver-to-child ratios when parents are not on site. Generally, you can have more children per caregiver when parents are on site. Check your state childcare regulations for more detailed information.
- Plan your childcare staffing in relation to center activities—i.e., dedicate extra childcare staff for times when large parent-only activities will be held (e.g., a community meeting). Review the center's activity calendar on a monthly basis to identify when childcare needs ebb and peak.
- Develop a system for recruiting, training, and supervising childcare workers, especially those who are hired on a contractual, as-needed basis.
- Many centers provide a set time and day of the week when drop-in childcare is available. This provides parents with a safe and enriched place for their children so that they can take care of other responsibilities or simply have a break.

There will be times when parents need emergency childcare, as well—an unexpected doctor's appointment, a babysitter who called in sick. Emergency childcare can help to prevent a crisis from feeling like a disaster and can be an important resource for families, however, it is important to ensure that the center's emergency care is just that—available for families when emergencies happen.

- Set guidelines for how often parents can access emergency childcare.
- Create a reciprocal relationship in which parents are asked to volunteer time to the center for every hour of emergency childcare they use.
- Help parents who seem to have a large need for emergency care to develop alternate care relationships.

In addition to the listed childcare services above, family support centers may also want to consider the following ways in which they can help to make childcare resources more available in communities:

Provide enriched, developmentally appropriate, permanent childcare on site.
Many family support centers provide childcare on site. The advantage of providing childcare on site is that it can be more easily integrated into other child development and family support components.

- For programs that choose to deliver childcare on site, connecting to the local childcare resource and referral agency (CCR&R) can be an important first step. CCR&Rs provide detailed information on the supply of childcare, the availability of subsidies and other valuable community resources for families, and changing family needs in the community. This information helps determine the appropriate childcare needs in the community and the rate to charge. CCR&Rs can also provide information on training opportunities for childcare staff and help to spread the word about the availability of childcare at the center. They can also provide information on identifying and accessing childcare subsides to support childcare for low-income families.

- Childcare regulations vary from state to state. You can find more information about the childcare regulations in your state by going to the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Childcare web site at http:\\nrc.uchsc.edu or by calling them at 800/598-KIDS. This federally funded national resource center has information on childcare across the country.

Child Development Programs

Beyond integrating and infusing child development activities into their overall programming, many family support centers also operate and administer specific early child development and childcare programs. Below is a description of a few of these programs.

Head Start

The federally funded Head Start program provides comprehensive developmental services for low-income, preschool children ages three to five and social services for families. Head Start focuses on

- providing education and learning experiences to foster intellectual, social, and emotional growth
- early identification of health problems and connection to a comprehensive health and nutrition program
- the involvement of parents in parent education, program planning, and operating activities
- access to needed social services

Head Start grantees must be either public or private nonprofit organizations or public school systems. The Administration for Children and Families' 10 regional offices and the Head Start Bureau's American Indian and Migrant Programs branches award grants for Head Start programs. Many family support centers are Head Start providers in their communities. To find out more about the Head Start Initiative refer to the DHHS/ACF web site at www.acf.dhhs.gov/.

Early Head Start

The Early Head Start program provides early, continuous, intensive and comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income families with children under the age of three. Projects must coordinate with local Head Start programs to ensure continuity of services for children and families. Depending on family and community needs, programs have a broad range of flexibility in how they provide these services. Early Head Start focuses on four cornerstones essential to quality programs:

How Our Center Does It

Early Childhood Family Education

With statewide headquarters in Roseville, Minnesota, Early Childhood Family Education is a program for every family in the state with children between birth and kindergarten enrollment. ECFE's mission is to strengthen families and support the ability of all parents to provide the best possible environment in which their children can grow and develop. ECFE operates in 380 out of a total of 392 school districts, involving more young children and their families than any other publicly sponsored early childhood service. Though ECFE programs vary from district to district, most programs include the following components:

- parent discussion groups
- play and learning activities for children
- special events for the entire family
- home visits
- early screening for children's health and developmental problems
- information on and referral to other community resources for families and young children
- libraries of books, toys, and other learning materials

Typically, a family attends a weekly two-hour session that includes parent/child interaction time and additional learning opportunities for the children while parents participate in discussion groups. Families that need more or different services may receive home visits and other specialized programs. ECFE also offers special services for single parents, teen parents, parents of children with disabilities, and employed parents. Each site designs its programs to meet the needs of families in its community.

- child development
- family development
- community building
- staff development

Again, many family support centers provide Early Head Start services in their communities. To find out more about the availability of Early Head Start dollars in your community contact your federal Department of Health and Human Services regional office.

State and Local Early Childhood Programs

Many states and a number of municipalities fund their own early childhood programs or initiatives. These can involve funding preschool programs, parent/child activities, home visits, or other early childhood activities. The National Center for Children and Poverty publishes every year an edition of *Map and Track* that provides an overview of state initiatives for young children and families. You can use this publication to find out more about the early childhood initiatives in your state.

Work with childcare providers and early childhood coalitions in your community to ensure that the care being provided is developmentally appropriate and includes family support components. Family support centers can assist childcare providers by helping them build the family-supportiveness of their care and by making resources from the center available. Family support centers can assist childcare providers in developing partnerships with parents and helping providers to strengthen their understanding and relationships with family members. Centers can also share with childcare providers information about community resources that might be of use to families.

Support and training for home-based day-care providers, who are often unlicensed and provide childcare out of their homes, can also be a valuable contribution of a family support center. While home-based providers are an important part of a comprehensive network of day-care options, too often they are isolated, work long hours, earn low wages, have more skills in caring for children than in running a business, and have no support when faced with problems. These challenges not only compromise the quality of care that home-based day-care providers can give, but also frequently lead to burnout.

Developmental Screenings

Developmental screenings are designed to identify and address any concerns or problems that may become a barrier to a child's development. With the enactment of the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, all children became entitled to appropriate,free education and related services regardless of disabilities. As a result, major strides have been made toward providing services for developmentally delayed children. To gain access to these services, children who are suspected of having developmental or physical disabilities are referred to trained and qualified individuals or teams for assessment. Family support centers and other early childhood settings can be instrumental in helping identify and connect children and families to the necessary assessments and early intervention service systems.

Because assessment of infants, toddlers, and young children requires sensitivity to the child's background and knowledge of testing limitations and assessment procedures with young children, family support centers should be careful not to offer developmental screenings or assessments unless qualified and trained are staff available to do so. Most family support centers find it more appropriate to refer families to community resources that specialize in assessments and are versed in the most appropriate approaches for child evaluation.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children ages birth through eight years and their families is guided by the following concepts:

1. Domains of children's development—physical, social, emotional and cognitive—are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains.

2. Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already captured.

3. Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of the child's functioning. Given the enormous variation among children of the same chronological age, a child's age must be recognized as only a crude index of developmental maturity.

4. Early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children's development; optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning.

5. Developmentally appropriate programs provide opportunities for children to broaden and deepen their behavioral knowledge through representing children's experiences in a variety of media, such as drawing, painting, construction of models, dramatic play, and verbal and written descriptions.

6. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

7. Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understanding of the world around them.

8. Development and learning result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds that children live in.

9. Play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.

10. As development advances, children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, as well as experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery.

11. Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know.

12. Children develop and learn best in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure.

Adapted from *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8.* 1996. Washington, D.C.: Association for the Education of Young Children.

How Our Center Does It

The Jane Addams Center

Chicago, Illinois

In the early 1980's, in response to a growing demand for childcare for infants and toddlers, Jane Addams Center (JAC) set out to increase the number and improve the quality of day care homes on Chicago's north side. The program consisted of three primary components:

- Training in opening a childcare business in one's own home, becoming an in-home provider (i.e., going to the home of the infant to provide care), or working as a day care aide in a day care center. These choices allowed participants to take their newly acquired skills and follow a career path most suited to their own goals and circumstances.
- Resource and referral services for parents seeking care for their children. Parents had similar choices: care in their own homes, care in providers' homes, or care in a center.
- The CARE program was designed specifically to support women who operated day care homes. The goal of the program was to keep day care home providers open for business, in other words, to prevent burn-out and turn-over, improve the quality of care provided to young children while in day care homes, and strengthen the links between young children's families and childcare experiences.

CARE organized networks of home providers in specific neighborhoods who met weekly in a central location with a space for the whole group to meet (providers and children), a meeting space for providers, and a space with large play equipment for the children. The time was divided into two parts. First, the providers would meet to discuss concerns and offer solutions. This time was designed to build a network of mutual support for the providers. The JAC staff would also provide relevant resources and information. Meanwhile, the children were busy playing in another area, supervised by JAC staff members. The room had climbing and larger equipment that most providers did not have within their own homes.

After the first hour, the providers and children met together. The center's CARE staff introduced a new activity that providers could use at home. The activities were developmentally appropriate and easily replicable. CARE groups also learned songs together and planned outings. If a child in the program appeared to have a developmental delay or behavioral or other health problem, staff members could assist the provider in working with the parents to connect them to appropriate resources.

In order to participate in the CARE program, parents needed to sign permission forms. Providers were responsible for explaining the goals and activities to parents using materials developed by JAC. Every family that participated in CARE received a monthly newsletter that provided information about what children and their care takers were learning and doing in the CARE program, including the words to songs! Parents were also given ideas about how to connect activities at home to what their children did at the CARE program.

By helping to identify problems early, programs can work with parents to minimize the effect of these problems on the child's overall development. For example, screenings can help to identify vision and/or hearing problems, which unless caught early can affect a child's ability to learn language. Regular screenings can also help to reassure parents with concerns about their children's development and can provide a vehicle for continuous interventions and reevaluation.

Literacy and Preliteracy Activities

Because learning to read is such an important developmental building block for children, literacy activities are important tools not only for learning and also for fostering closer parent/child relationships. Joint parent/child reading activities encourage emotional bonding between parents and children. When young children read books with their parents, they not learn only words, language, and ideas; they learn that they are important and that their parents will devote attention and affection to them. In a hectic and noisy world, parent/child reading is an excellent opportunity for families to share quality time together based on physical closeness and learning. Reading and literacy activities also take place within a larger environment of language, play, and interaction.

Literacy and language development are not restricted to books—language development begins at birth. For further discussion of early literacy issues, see chapter 4, which discusses family support models that focus on family literacy issues.

Recreational Activities

"Play is child's work"

—Erik Erikson

Play is indeed the work of children. Play is how children learn and grow. Young babies and children master various skills through play and it is through play that they learn about the world around them. Play also provides an important opportunity for children to learn about social interaction and build socialization skills. Using play to provide developmentally appropriate activities also allows children to discover things about themselves and their capacities, thereby enhancing self-esteem and confidence.

Play Groups for Young Children

Structured play groups provide important opportunities to help children build concrete socialization skills such as sharing, taking turns, cooperating with others, listening and sharing attention. Here are some tips for planning play groups:

- Try to keep play groups small and to group children of approximately the same age in each group—especially at young ages, a one or two year difference in children's ages can be significant.
- Ask parents to help facilitate play groups.
- Choose toys for play groups based on their educational value and their appropriateness to the age of the children in the group.

Toy/Book Lending Libraries

Toy and book lending libraries provide an opportunity for family support centers to make available to parents a wide range of developmentally appropriate toys that they can use to play with their children. Using the toy lending library is a wonderful opportunity for staff to engage parents in conversations about the importance of play, how to identify developmentally appropriate toys, the developmental milestones their children are currently working on, and other important child development issues. Having the toys available can also encourage parents to set aside time to play with their children every week.

Programming that Reinforces School-aged Learning

Family support centers should work with their local school systems to ensure that programming for children of school age reflects and reinforces what is taught in the classrooms. Through family support centers, children are offered an opportunity to apply academic concepts and lessons to day-to-day activities. Activities that reinforce school-based learning can serve to strengthen a child's attachment and commitment to school by connecting what is taught in the classroom to the "real world."

Play groups offer children many opportunities:

- They get used to being away from their own parents and being with other adults.
- They learn how to get along with other children.
- They learn more about being independent.
- They develop self-confidence.
- They develop a positive feeling about being in a group.
- They have the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities.
- They have fun.

From the National Network for Childcare. Part of CYFERNET, the National Extension Service Children Youth and Family Educational Research Network.

Field Trips

Field trips can provide opportunities to reinforce what children are learning in school—or to learn about something different through fun and engaging outside activities. They provide an opportunity to get school-aged kids out into the world and learning by doing, or by interacting in a very different way than they do in the classroom. When planning fieldtrips:

- Identify specific learning goals for each trip.
- Evaluate logistical difficulties (safety, transportation, or other challenges)
- Start working to get parent volunteers early. It's important to ensure that there will be enough adults available to ensure that the children are adequately supervised and no one gets lost.
- Make sure to ask for volunteers who can drive, as transportation is always one of the challenges.

Developmentally Appropriate Toys

Newborn to 1-year-old baby: Choose brightly-colored, lightweight toys that appeal to baby's sight, hearing, and touch.

- large blocks of wood or plastic
- pots and pans
- rattles
- soft, washable animals, dolls, or balls
- bright, movable objects that are out of baby's reach
- busy boards
- floating bath toys and squeeze toys

1- to 2-year-old toddler: Toys for this age group should be safe and be able to withstand a toddler's curious nature.

- cloth, plastic, or board books with large pictures
- sturdy dolls
- kiddy cars
- musical tops
- nesting blocks
- push and pull toys (remember—no long strings)
- stacking toys
- toy telephones (without cords)

2- to 5-year-old preschooler: Toys for this age group can be creative or imitate the activity of parents and older children.

- books (short stories or action stories)
- blackboard and chalk
- building blocks
- crayons, nontoxic finger paints, clay
- hammer and bench
- housekeeping toys
- outdoor toys: sandbox (with a lid), slide, swing, playhouse
- transportation toys (tricycles, cars, wagons)
- tape or record player
- simple puzzles with large pieces
- dress-up clothes
- tea party utensils

5- to 9-year-old child: Toys for this age group should help children develop new skills and creativity.

- blunt scissors, sewing sets
- card games
- doctor and nurse kits
- hand puppets
- bicycles with helmets
- electric trains
- paper dolls
- jump ropes
- roller skates with protective gear
- table games

10- to 14-year-old child: Hobbies and scientific activities are ideal for this age group.

- computer games
- sewing, knitting, needlework
- microscopes/telescopes
- table and board games
- sports equipment
- hobby collections

From the American Academy of Pediatrics

- Give volunteers both written and oral instructions ahead of time.
- Get parent consent forms out to the parents of all participating children with enough time to follow up with parents who haven't replied.
- Make sure that your insurance policy covers accidents that happen off-site.

Homework Clubs

Homework clubs help to address a number of issues. They provide an after-school care setting that is an important resource for many working parents. They encourage children to focus and set aside time to complete their homework as their first priority after the school day. Finally, they provide an opportunity for children to discuss their school work collaboratively with their peers—of course, whoever is staffing the homework club will need to ensure that working together does not become cheating.

- Have a computer available where children can get on-line and research their homework topics. There are some great homework help pages available on the web where kids can get instant access to dictionaries, encyclopedias and fun reference resources. You can do an online search for "homework help" to find many of them. Bookmark a few good ones on the web browser so kids can find them easily.
- Have a range of educational but fun activities available for kids as rewards once their homework is done.
- Create a "learning center" within your family support center. Make sure that it is out of the way of distractions and noisy areas. Stock it with all the things children need when doing homework—reference books (encyclopedias, dictionaries, a thesaurus); pencils, pens, and paper; desks or tables for kids to sit at; a white board for kids to draw on.

Academic Mentoring Programs

Academic mentoring programs can either link an older student with a younger student or can link a student with an adult mentor or coach. The advantage of programs that link a younger and an older student is that they provide not only needed mentoring to younger students, but they provide older students an opportunity to reinforce what they have learned by explaining it to another, and to develop self-confidence and leadership skills. Adult-to-student mentoring programs can provide an important opportunity to create a linkage between a child and a caring adult.

When developing a mentoring program, the following factors can be important:

- Screening potential mentors—Ensure that candidates truly can make the time commitment needed, have a supportive attitude, and feel comfortable with the academic content they will be asked to coach kids on.
- Supporting mentors—Make sure to reward and encourage your mentors, to check in with them often about how the relationship is working out and to work with them to solve any logistical or other problems they are having. Arrange for supervision backup for mentors.
- Creating a nonstigmatizing environment—Being connected to an academic mentor should not be a sign that a child is failing. Try to encourage children from across the academic spectrum to participate in mentoring programs and encourage mentors to integrate nonacademic, fun activities into their work with kids. Maintain ongoing feedback from those who are mentored as well as from mentors.

Chapter 5 describes methodological issues in setting up mentoring programs in more detail.

Access to Computers

The use of computers among children has increased dramatically in the past decade. In school settings, the ratio of students to computers has gone from one for every 125 students in 1983 to one for every nine students in 1995 (Glennan and Melmed 1996). Many schools currently have one computer for every two students. Because of the impact of computers on learning and family life, family support centers need to think about the role that computers can play in child development, school-age learning, and family literacy goals.

Throughout the nation, there continues to be heated debate on the benefits and effects of technology on children's lives. Advocates of technology argue that computers can help children with individual and group learning and can improve communications between students. They cite studies that note that computers have been used to provide students with opportunities for "drill and practice" since the 1960s and that this type of instruction has been evaluated repeatedly. The evidence suggests that students who use computer instruction demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement. Advocates also note that more recent uses of technology, such as those that support higher-order thinking skills, have not been widely evaluated, but the few studies that have been done indicate promising results.

Others view the use of technology to promote children's learning critically. Critics point out that the costs of buying and maintaining computers are not proportionate to the gains to academic achievement. Tutoring, for example, has been found to produce greater gains for less money. In addition, critics claim that cognitive theories of education suggest that learning includes a social, noncognitive element. Students learn not only because they process information but also because of the complex reinforcements they receive from teachers and the socialization process in which learning is embedded. As computers move toward being the core of the learning environment, opportunities for social interaction will be limited, thus interfering with the learning process.

Family support centers must examine both sides of the technology debate and decide the degree to which they wish to invest resources into computer-assisted learning. If a decision is made to invest in technology, then corporate giving programs such as Gifts in Kind could be utilized to secure donated computer hardware. The Gifts in Kind program can be reached at www.giftsinkind.org.

Academic Learning at Home

Some of the most important things that a parent can do for a child are to reinforce the idea that learning is important, encourage the child to become a learner, and engage with the child's school and schooling. Unfortunately, for many parents, especially those who do not feel positive about their own school experience, assuming this role can be challenging. Family support centers can

- stress the importance of being involved in a child's education
- encourage parents to develop "at-home learning plans" that include fun, age-appropriate parent/child activities that help children learn
- encourage parents to ask their child about what they are learning in school every day and to set aside some time each evening to talk to children about their homework
- offer one-on-one staff time to help parents understand their child's homework if they are having difficulty
- offer to assist parents in developing a list of questions to ask their children's teachers or to go with them to parent-teacher conferences if they need support—some parents feel intimidated by these conferences

- encourage parents to make trips to the library and museums, and other places that offer learning opportunities to compliment what is being taught in school
- encourage parents to volunteer in their children's classrooms to get a better sense of what their child is learning

Youth Development Activities

Most family support programs build strong relationships with parents of young children, and support parents during the challenging life stage of learning to care for a new life. As the children of these parents grow older, family support programs can build on these relationships to support families as the children go on through the elementary school years and adolescence. Adolescence is a time of many transitions for youth, and it often brings about challenging times at home as both youth and their parents adjust to changes in children's bodies, intellect, and need for independence. Parents may need even more support as their children approach adolescence. Family support centers can

- help parents understand the changing developmental needs of adolescents and suggest ways of connecting and communicating with teens.
- provide opportunities, such as support groups, for parents of adolescents to encourage each other and swap practical advice. For families that are really struggling with the transitions of adolescence, family counseling services may be provided or links to such services may be made.
- adapt program activity times to help families spend time together. Offer family events and programming that can accommodate a variety of schedules.
- support youth as they approach adulthood, inviting adolescents to participate in youth-oriented activities. A family support center can both provide youth with a safe place to spend their afternoons as well as help prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. Through activities and interaction with peers and other adults, programs can provide youth with opportunities to safely explore their interests, learn about and build upon their strengths, and develop a strong sense of self. These activities also help youth develop leadership and activist skills, life skills, and communication skills; practice conflict resolution; and strengthen their decision-making skills and abilities.
- help strengthen and ease stressful relationships between adolescents and their parents. Adolescence is a time when the youth struggle for autonomy and the quest for independence can put a strain on parent/child relationships. Family support centers can help families through this often difficult time period by helping parents understand that their children's efforts to achieve independence are part of a normal developmental process.

In addition to family-focused youth activities, some family support centers also see as their mission a more intentional focus on working directly with youth to help them make the transition to adulthood. These programs are discussed in more detail in chapter 4, where we discuss how the family support model can be applied to meet specific goals.

Parent/Child Activities

Parent/child activities offer a nonjudgmental, nonintimidating way to encourage parents to participate in the center; provide an opportunity for parents to engage in concrete skill-building with their children; and help to foster connections between the parents in the program, as well as between center staff and participant family members. Using the healthy development of their children as the point of common concern, parents and the center staff begin to develop relationships of trust and informal support.

By reaching out to parents and other family members with developmentally appropriate child activities, family support centers can have a big influence on the physical, social, and intellectual development of children and youth. Family support centers can help parents become their children's first and most influential teachers by providing opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together. As places where families can be together to share in nurturing and stimulating environments, family support centers can offer a child positive early social and emotional experiences.

Parent/child activities can include structured activities led by trained family development workers that offer parents new ways of interacting with their children and connections with other parents. They might be as informal as a supervised play room where parents can take their children to play with developmentally appropriate toys and catch up with other parents. Parents and children playing together helps to increase attachment and bonding, and family support centers can help by teaching parents games that they can do at home with their children. Programs can also help by exploring ways that parents can slow down, relax, and enjoy their children more.

Home Visits
Parent/child activities should be incorporated into any home visiting program offered by the center. Home visitors provide parents with information and activities that encourage and promote day-to-day learning with their children. For more information on home visits, see chapter 5.

Family Fun Nights
Opening the center up to families for recreational or family-oriented activities such as dinners and desserts, art and crafts nights, games, and play nights promotes positive parent/child interactions, especially for parents of older children. For more information on family recreational programming, see chapter 5.

At-Home Games
Provide parents, grandparents, and other key family members with at-home age-appropriate activities that allow parents to recognize signs of cognitive development. These games can provide a special time for involvement and sharing.

Drop-in Family Time
Offer structured parent/child activities led by trained family development workers that show parents new ways of interacting with their children and connecting with other parents.

Life Skills

Family support centers recognize that adults continue to grow and develop not just as parents, but as people. Just as programs promote child development throughout the life cycle, they also support the healthy development of adults. Adult development activities available in family support centers generally focus on increasing adults' skills and competencies to assist them in their day-to-day lives. All adult development activities should

- be guided by knowledge about the variety of ways in which adults learn
- respect what the adults already know
- relate to what the adult wants to learn for improving or removing problems
- be practical and applicable
- foster peer learning and teaching among the adults

Life skills programs are one way for individuals to acquire fundamental skills for building capacity to achieve goals for themselves and their families. Life skills are an integral part of any family support program because they enhance parents' ability to care for their children and for themselves and to keep their family strong. As with any family support program, life skills can be implemented in many different ways according to the interest, needs, and desires of the families who participate in the center.

Life Skills Education

Life skills education provides an opportunity for participants to strengthen skills that will help them to succeed in everyday tasks such as developing and maintaining a household budget, shopping for and preparing nutritious meals, using public transportation, securing and maintaining employment, and so on. Below are four basic areas in which life skills education is often offered and examples of potential class topics in each area.

Interpersonal Skills

This includes information that helps participants develop their skills and knowledge around how to build strong, supportive relationships with others. Potential topics include

- conflict resolution/negotiation
- effective communication
- interpersonal problem solving

Personal Growth and Development

This includes information that will help participants to be in control of and set the direction for the course of their own lives. Potential topics include

- goal setting
- time management
- decision making/problem solving
- building self-esteem
- stress management

Skill Building

This includes information that will help participants succeed at specific tasks and functions in their life. Potential topics include

- personal safety
- nutrition/cooking
- exercise classes
- arts and crafts
- managing personal/family finances and credit
- knowledge about community resources and how to access services

Professional Development

This includes information that helps individuals to succeed in their jobs and careers. Potential areas include

- general education development (GED)
- adult basic education (ABE)
- English as second language (ESL)
- job training and job-search assistance
- work values
- career planning and goal setting
- balancing work and family life

Depending on the topic, the center could offer a one-time class or an ongoing series of workshops. The information in chapter 5 on starting and running classes is helpful for designing and developing life skills workshops in your center.

How Our Center Does It

The Family Place
Washington, D.C.

This multicultural family support center, serving primarily African American families with children from birth to age nine, runs a "University for Parents" to enhance communication skills, promote active listening, and develop a sense of community and conscience in children and parents. Their life-skills programming consists of parenting classes with life-skills workshops held once a month. These workshops include

- **financial planning—how to start a mutual fund**
- **nutrition/cooking workshops—how to cook low-cost, low-fat, nutritional meals**
- **health and beauty workshops—how improve self-esteem and lower stress**
- **car safety—how to keep one's car safe**

Goal Setting with Parents

Many programs also work one-on-one with families to support them in setting goals for their future. These sessions can help family members to draw upon their skills and capacities to address the specific day-to-day challenges they face. Often, in goal-setting sessions, families reflect on accomplishments, celebrate the positive things going on in their lives, and make a plan for the future. While goal-setting sessions can be done with an individual parent, it is much more powerful to engage the entire family in the process of working together toward shared goals. In order to engage in goal setting with families, it is important to have staff members available who

- are good listeners
- can relate to the day-to-day realities of the families that they are working with
- have good problem-solving skills, and are able to keep focused and balanced conversations going
- understand the importance of maintaining family confidentiality

One tool for one-on-one goal-setting work with families is a family assessment. Family assessments assist the family in collecting information on the family's structure, extended family and friends, issues they are facing, strengths to build on, and their hopes for the future. Once families collect this information in a systematic way they have a good foundation for goal setting. Often the very act of gathering and reviewing the information can help family members think more holistically about their lives and where they want to go. Your program can develop a family assessment tool specific to the program or you can use one of the many tools available.

One-on-one work with parents is described in more detail in chapter 5 in the section on family development work.

Informal Network Building

Another core function of family support programs is linking families to each other to build networks of mutual support and caring, resource sharing, and emotional and social support. Building social networks is an essential part of community capacity-building role that all family support centers undertake. Much of what family support centers do is facilitate parents getting to know each other. Programs expect that parents will become friends, share information and opinions, help and use each other, share worries and concerns, make plans together, and connect each other to resources. The premise is that parents will build their social connections through the program, thereby increasing their social capital and reducing isolation.

Support Groups

Because support groups can be used for many different purposes, the logistics of setting up and running support groups are covered in more detail in chapter 5. Beyond their specific content functions, support groups are one of the key ways in which family support centers help to build relationships between families in the program. Support groups provide an opportunity for participants to get to know and support each other in an intimate, small group session and can provide an important opportunity to build social linkages between families.

Social Activities

Many family support centers use center-wide activities—family nights, open houses, movie nights—as an opportunity to connect families not only to the center, but also to each other. These social events can bring a large number of people together and can act as a social mixer of sorts. In low-income areas, these events may be the only way that families can go out for the night in an affordable manner.

Smaller social events—a coffee hour, a breakfast club, a parent/child book group—can provide smaller, more intimate ways for participants to get to know each other and support each other in an informal setting. These smaller, more informal gatherings can serve many of the same functions as a support group, but because they are organized around a social activity, they may attract some individuals who may be uncomfortable with the idea of participating in a formal support group.

Peer Linkages

Often, programs help to create specific mentoring or sharing relationships between participating families or individuals. Staff members serve as matchmakers, linking families that share common interests (e.g., children of the same age, parents of twins), have similar backgrounds, or can somehow help or support each other. Below are some ideas for fostering peer linkages:

- **Peer-based resource sharing:** Create a babysitting cooperative or develop carpools for families living near one another.
- **Celebrations:** Share baby showers or birthday parties on a regular basis so that families can join in celebrating each other's milestones.

- **Skills banks:** A skills bank is a database of parent skills and capacities. A parent can make a deposit into the skills bank by helping another parent. He or she can withdraw from the skills bank by asking another parent to help. An example of a skills bank model is given in the section on community economic development in chapter 4. To learn more about setting up a skills bank, please see *Family Support and Time Dollars* (Family Support America 2000).

- **Family-to-family mentoring:** Link families together in a mentoring relationship. For example, a family with a child with special needs could be linked with another family with a special-needs child who could provide guidance and support during the process of having the child assessed and enrolled in needed services. Or a new arrival to the community (and country) can be matched with a family who is familiar with the community. Chapter 5 describes how to set up mentoring programs in more detail.

Newsletters

Newsletters are simple means of connecting participants not only to what is going on at the center, but what is going on in each other's lives. Family support centers use newsletters to

- encourage participation by distributing regular calendars and announcements about center events
- create a sense of community by sharing and celebrating the successes of individual families (e.g., birth announcements, graduation information, etc.)
- help participants to express their views about issues that are affecting them and their community by writing articles and contributing to the newsletter
- seek needed resources, listing want ads and offerings from skills banks

Warmlines

Warmlines offer free telephone consultation to parents when they have concerns or questions about their children's development or behavior or simply need someone to talk to. They can be staffed by experienced parents and/or professionals. They provide parents with practical and detailed information about childcare and development, support groups, and referrals for crisis or medical issues. Warmlines offer a knowledgeable and friendly source of information and encouragement that is just a phone call away—connecting parents with each other and to resources in their communities. There are four basic ways that warmlines are managed:

- **Calls are answered at a central location.** Staff or volunteers usually work in two- to four-hour shifts to handle callers' requests for information, advice, and support. A coordinator is needed to schedule workers and also recruit, train, and supervise staff. Office space and telephones are often provided through a sponsoring agency, such as a hospital, childcare resource and referral agency, parent education agency, school district, or pediatrician's office.

One warmline offers information on:

- childcare resources
- day camp information
- a new mothers' support group
- matching members
- drop-in playgroups
- a parent resource magazine
- a speaker series
- community guides available
- finding childcare

- **Calls are dispatched to a volunteers' home.** The flexibility of dispatching calls to the homes of volunteers is attractive to parent volunteers and saves the warmline both staff time and money. Calls are answered and screened at one location, and messages are relayed to volunteer parents who return the calls, usually within a few hours. It is common for clerical staff at the sponsoring agency to answer and dispatch calls. At the beginning of their shifts, volunteers call the warmline central number for messages, or some programs use a "cross-connect" system whereby incoming calls can be transferred directly to a volunteer's home phone. Such expediency is particularly appropriate if a parent calls and is anxious to talk with someone right away.

  Instead of using "on-call" shifts as described above, warmlines that are dedicated to serving parents with children of special needs may make arrangements to match each caller with a specific warmline volunteer who has had similar experiences, such as parenting a handicapped child or parenting twins. Volunteers in programs of this type often establish ongoing relationships with callers that may include weekly phone contact. It is common for these type of warmline programs to expand and offer support groups and other activities.

- **Outreach is offered.** In warmline outreach programs, volunteers contact expectant or new parents to offer information and support. Resources for initial contacts may include birth announcements in local newspapers or registration lists from childbirth preparation classes. Each new parent may be called several times after the birth of a child and is encouraged to use the warmline as a resource on an as-needed basis.

- **Information is taped.** Audiotapes on issues of common concern for parents may be produced or purchased for use by a warmline program. Lists of the topics that are available on tape are usually distributed throughout the community, or specific tapes may be recommended directly to those who call the warmline.

Advocacy

Most family support centers engage in advocacy on behalf of families. They stand up for families whose rights have been violated, such as a family who has been denied services for which they are eligible. They advocate for policy changes to benefit individual families, such as a child who tests into a special education classroom and whose parents want him or her to be in a regular classroom. Often they represent the interests of families in front of city, state, and federal policymakers. It is true that families need assistance at times in obtaining the services they need and in articulating what they want for their community. However, family support centers ultimately aim to empower families and strengthen their own capacity to be advocates for themselves. By stepping in when parents are capable of speaking up for themselves, we deprive them of important opportunities to affect the world around them. Furthermore, policymakers need to hear about the experiences, hopes, and needs of families directly from families—and neither practitioners in the field nor senators on Capitol Hill can express the reality of American families as well as families themselves.

Few citizens in the United States ever become politically active. Many believe that the political system to be too complex, distant, or corrupt to be affected by individual efforts. Families who are disempowered or alienated from the systems that serve them are especially discouraged from participating in the political process. In order to take action, families must have faith both in their own ability to communicate their ideas clearly and that their ideas will be heard and valued. Family support centers can play a key role in changing the way families think about their ability to effect change in the world around them. By demonstrating to families that their input is highly valued and by helping them to develop advocacy skills, the center can play a key role in building families' confidence and competence to become more engaged in shaping the politics and policies that in turn shape their lives.

How Our Center Does It

Community Organizing and Family Issues
Chicago, Illinois

COFI's nontraditional community organizing model has helped over 600 low-income families become successful advocates for themselves and their communities. Working from the principle that building strong families is an important aspect of building strong communities, COFI partners with local community groups to provide leadership training that focuses on personal and family development. Parents spend the first stage of training discussing their personal and family goals and their vision for the community. In these sessions, parents discuss their hopes for themselves and their families; the challenges they face day to day in raising children; staying safe; maintaining economic stability; and negotiating education, housing, childcare, and social service systems.

As parents share their concerns with one another and realize that they struggle with many of the same issues, it becomes clear that their personal concerns are also community concerns. They begin to discuss ways in which they can support each other and work together to meet common objectives. As parents succeed in improving their own neighborhoods, they begin to consider the effects of city, state, and even national policies on their communities, and they discuss possibilities for impacting such policies. One parent group set up a meeting with their U.S. congressman to discuss their concerns about national policies regarding immigrants.

COFI offers additional training to parents interested in working for change within the community. These parents form leadership teams to identify community goals and make plans to achieve them. Parent teams conduct outreach, interviewing other members of the community to identify community assets and challenges and to discover other potential community leaders. Led by the parent teams, residents push for positive changes in their community. One parent action team on Chicago's near west side planned, designed, and obtained funding for a new community center in less than a year. Parents in other neighborhoods have instituted school uniform policies, established parent patrols, successfully lobbied for park repairs and clean-up, cracked down on prostitution, and brought GED and ESL classes to their neighborhoods.

Program Decision Making

Parent leadership skills are strengthened within the center simply by operating according to the family support principle of working with parents as partners. Parents should have roles to play in a variety of program activities and operations. Encourage parents to express their opinion by regularly asking parents for input through surveys, suggestion boxes, meetings, or in informal chats. Then act on those suggestions. This shows parents that they can influence outcomes, that their input is valuable, and that their participation is worthwhile – and parents will be more likely to speak up again. Each time parents make a suggestion, they are building the very skills they can use later with teachers, city officials, and United States senators. Leadership and advocacy skills may also be built by establishing leadership positions for parents. Ask parents to help in the design or evaluation of services, or to sit on the center's board as voting members. Provide them with real opportunities to make their voices heard and affect program policies and practices. If parents are receiving mixed messages from the program, efforts to build leadership skills will be significantly hindered. Make sure that the center and all staff truly value, solicit, and utilize parent input.

Community Policymaking

Once families have the skills and the confidence to speak up for what they need and want within the program, it is time to apply those skills to effecting change within the broader community. Encourage parents to attend neighborhood, school, community policing, and other meetings where they can make a difference. If possible, provide them with childcare and travel assistance for these meetings. Explore with parents what they can do to affect their community. Host "what do we want for our community?" discussions where parents talk about their vision for the community, identify barriers to achieving that vision, and lay out possible steps to overcome barriers and pursue their vision. Finally, work with other community groups and organizations to bring concerned parents together for discussions and to connect on common goals such as obtaining a crossing guard for a dangerous intersection or safer equipment at the local playground.

Provide opportunities for parents to practice their new advocacy skills and gain more confidence by inviting political leaders to the program to talk with families. Encourage parents to think of questions and issues they want to raise in advance. Have parents write "scripts" so that they know what to say when they call and/or meet with political leaders. Provide parents training on leadership and advocacy skills. The program can select from a variety of existing parent leadership training curricula, develop a curriculum themselves, or link parents to other training models. Alternatively, the center can offer one-day workshops to build the skills and knowledge base of parents. For instance, invite someone from the mayor's office to talk to parents about how the city's political process works and how citizens can have a voice in city policy. The center could offer a short workshop on writing effective advocacy letters and give parents time to practice writing letters to policymakers about issues important to them.

How Our Center Does It

Parent Advocates for Youth

San Francisco, California

Parent Advocates for Youth (PAY) enables parents to become effective advocates for policies important to them and their children. PAY recruits parents throughout the city by advertising in schools, family support centers, libraries, and other locations. PAY then trains them to become parent advocates.

Parents who participate in PAY receive training on San Francisco's political process, as well as methods of influencing officials and the media. Parents gain experience speaking out for themselves, their children, and their community, and they learn how to work with other groups with shared interests and concerns. PAY parents then share their new skills and knowledge with their neighbors and communities, broadening the impact of PAY. Parents participating in PAY commit to doing 12 hours of advocacy work a month, as well as attending a weekly meeting where the parents discuss goals, design strategies, and assign tasks among the members. To help offset childcare and other expenses, parents receive a small stipend.

PAY parents have challenged the city on a variety of issues, including a campaign to improve the condition of San Francisco's deteriorating parks. PAY parents visited a random selection of the city's parks and graded them based on facilities, playground equipment, safety, programs for children, maintenance, and other criteria. Over the course of two years, PAY held roundtable discussions with parents from throughout the city, issued three report cards on the state of the city parks, and encouraged parents throughout the city to rate the quality of the parks in their own neighborhoods. PAY then suggested steps for improving the parks, which the San Francisco Board of Directors approved and subsequently backed up with a funding increase for Parks and Recreation. As a result, parks were able to add police staffing, increase employment opportunities for youth, and make minor improvements to facilities. In addition, PAY successfully lobbied for money to conduct an assessment of dilapidated park facilities in preparation for a facilities improvement bond initiative.

Other campaigns have led city officials to solicit parent input regularly, and PAY parents have been asked to serve on the Mayor's Welfare Reform Task Force and other initiatives. In order to continue broadening their scope and impact on public policies, PAY is creating the Parent Action Network, a citywide alliance of parents from every neighborhood in the city who are ready, willing, and able to advocate for the children of San Francisco.

Broader Political Activity

Once families are engaged in community policymaking process, the program can encourage them to participate in city, state, and national politics by emphasizing the linkages between government policies and their lives. Maintain a bulletin board on state and federal policy initiatives, and ask families how they think proposed laws could affect them and their community. If families are especially interested in or upset by a proposed bill, encourage them to talk to other families about it and brainstorm ways of informing policymakers of the potential impacts of the bill. As families begin to assert their right to influence decisions that affect them, provide them with the means to become more politically involved. Encourage families to join politically-minded community groups, or to form a Parents' Policy Committee that meets regularly to discuss parents' goals for the community or other issues and plans steps to achieve those goals. Find out about other groups and organizations in the community that value parent input and work on issues of concern to families. Keep parents informed of the activities of these groups and let them know how they can get involved. Finally, provide as much support as possible to parents' political activities. For example, provide a meeting space, offer the use of photocopiers or computers, or make staff available to provide assistance when requested (as long as such assistance does not violate federal constraints on lobbying by nonprofits).

Information and Referral

As comprehensive as most family support programs try to be, none can "do it all." Information and referral activities provide participants with links to services not on site, and help to ensure participants' basic needs are met. Some examples of resources to which families may be referred include childcare centers,

Examples of Community Associations and Informal Support Groups

Artistic organization:
choral, theatrical, writing
Business organization:
Chamber of Commerce, trade association
Charitable group:
Red Cross, Cancer Society, United Way
Church group:
service, prayer, maintenance, stewardship, acolytes
Community event:
Fourth of July celebration, art fair, Halloween
Community support group:
friends of the library, block club
Group for the elderly
Ethnic association:
Sons of Norway, Black Heritage Club
Health and fitness group:
Interest group: Poodle owners, antique car owners
Local government:
town, township, electoral unit, fire department, emergency unit
Local media:
radio, newspaper, local access, cable TV
Men's group:
cultural, political, social, educational, vocational
Mutual support:
Alcoholics Anonymous, Epilepsy Self-help, La Leche League
Neighborhood or block club:
crime watch, beautification, Christmas decorations
Outdoor group:
garden club, Audubon Society, conservation club
Political organization:
Democrats, Republicans, caucuses
School group:
printing club, PTA, MADD
Service club:
Zonta, Kiwanis, Rotary
Social cause group:
peace, rights, advocacy, service
Sports league:
Veteran group:
American Legion, Amvets, VFW
Women's group:
Cultural, political, social, educational, vocational
Youth group:
4H, Future Farmers of America, Scouts, YMCA

health care providers, counseling services, neighborhood or community policing groups, legal aid, spiritual centers, food banks, housing and domestic violence shelters, and sources of public benefits. Information and referral activities provide participants with a point of entry to available support networks. Family support centers should monitor the availability and quality of the resources and services they are referring families to on an ongoing basis. They should also seek feedback from families on their experiences with the referral and the quality of service received.

All family support centers, before they open their doors, should participate in some sort of community assessment process. Part of that process is generating a picture of the formal and informal supports already available in the community (see the section on community assessment in chapter 2). This picture will act as the starting point for information and referral activities. From there, specific efforts to engage particular community groups and agencies in the center's referral system should be made (see chapter 14).

These activities aim to ensure that agencies work together, prevent duplication of services and territory disputes, and share information. A key practice in doing this is reciprocity—thinking in terms of an ongoing mutual relationship. In addition, programs should build in a feedback loop through which the effectiveness of those referrals may be informally evaluated. Information about possible referrals may be solicited from community members in the community assessment stage, and it should be asked of participants once they have experienced the referral.

Information and referral should be practiced within the guidelines for family support practice, which means building upon participants' own experience of community resources. Family-supportive information and referral keeps the strengths of the community and the participants' own support networks as the point of reference.

Staff and Program Participants as Resources

Staff and participants may have the latest information on what is available in the community and may be able to make suggestions on what referral would be the best. In addition, over time, particular staff or community members may develop a rapport with a particular agency or group, and thus can serve as a facilitator in obtaining that source's help.

Training

Make sure staff members are aware of different community resources through training and on-site agency visits. This awareness should be fostered through orientation training before a staff member begins work. Also, community resource updates should be shared whenever an in-service training session is offered or circulated in written form in employees' mail boxes.

Staff Partnerships

Partner new staff members with veteran staff so they can learn the ins and outs of the local support services networks, including personal contacts with different resources. This may be done during and/or after a formal orientation process. Providing support for staff is imperative, and encouraging learning from peers who have expertise to offer follows family support principles. Without this support, new staff members may become anxious about doing referrals because of their lack of knowledge. Partnering alleviates some of that nervousness, provides bonding experiences, and ensures that participants have access to the best information possible.

Staff Development

Make sure staff members are not just staying with "comfortable" referral networks but expanding their resources regularly. It can be easy to continue referring to a few resources known to be helpful in the past; however, this may result in a less than optimal use of local resources. Have staff members set goals for themselves in discovering new and creative ways to aid participants in accessing resources, and provide ongoing staff development activities where they may learn of other community referrals.

Information Database

Staff cannot be omniscient. Referral sites are numerous in communities, and often they may change rapidly. By keeping a comprehensive list of different groups and agencies, if a preferred referral is not available for some reason, other resources may be accessed easily. Printing out the database and having a couple copies available in a book or binder form is also a good strategy. This gives parents an opportunity to browse and find out about resources without necessarily having to go through a staff member—and gives staff somewhere to go if the computer system goes down.

Participant Evaluation

After a participant has had an experience with a site, ask for his or her evaluation of its helpfulness. This information could be kept in the above-mentioned binder, circulated as part of a staff newsletter, or shared in training or supervision so that future information seekers have a better idea of the quality of the support provided by that particular source.

Interagency Communication

If the center is physically close to or located within another agency, make sure that the lines of communication are open and that participants in both programs have easy access to resources in each. Invite the other agency to occasionally swap staff members to become better acquainted with each other's resources. Hold joint meetings quarterly. Invite their staff to an open house. Discuss formal referral procedures such as common intake forms. With agencies to which your center does a large amount of referrals, you may want to consider working collaboratively on common intake or referrals forms or even shared outreach materials.

Support for Participants

Offer to accompany participants to appointments or meetings. Beyond helping a participant find a referral source or set up an appointment (if necessary), providing participants with support in seeking that resource can ease anxiety and ensure better experiences overall. Have a staff member or parent advocate accompany him or her to the new office, or find another program participant who is already taking part in the resource to introduce him or her to other participants. This can be especially important for participants experiencing language barriers, or for participants who need to access a resource or agency with which they have had bad experiences in the past.

Community Group Presentations

Invite community groups and resource providers to give presentations in the center on the activities they offer. They may also wish to leave literature on their programs with the center. Bringing staff and/or participants from other programs to the center not only allows staff and program participants to become more educated as to the resources they offer, but also builds relationships in a personal and professional sense. In the future, this can ease the whole referral process.

Resources

For more resources in the subjects covered in this chapter, see pages 106–116.

Parenting Education and Child Development

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Guide for Choosing Native American Parenting Curricula
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By S. Feinberg and S. Feldman. 1996. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.

Organizations

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
Phone: 847/434-4000
Fax: 847/434-8000
www.aap.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1509 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1426
Phone: 202/328-2605
www.naeyc.org/naeyc

National Black Child Development Institute
1023 15th Street, NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/387-1281
Fax: 202/234-1738

National Center for Children in Poverty
The Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University
154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032
Phone: 212/304-7100
Fax: 212/544-4200
cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/

National Parent Information Network
ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Phone: 800/583-4135
Fax: 217/333-3767
npin.org

National Parenting Education Network
npen.crc.uiuc.edu/

Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation
435 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 770
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: 312/222-3512
www.rrmtf.org/

ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families
734 15th Street, NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/638-1144
www.zerotothree.org

Information and Referral

Publications

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Advocacy

Publications

Essential Allies: Families as Advisors
By E. S. Jeppson and J. Thomas. 1995. Bethesda, Md.: Institute for Family-Centered Care.

FRC Report: Parents Leading the Way
Vol. 15, No. 2. 1996. Chicago Ill.: Family Support America.

Partnerships for Change
By F. Woratschek. 1997. Two videos plus 50-page guide. Pittsburgh, Penna.: Family Communications and University of Pittsburgh office of Child Development.

Handbook on Tax Rules for Voter Participation Work by Section 501(c)(3) Organizations
By T. A. Troyer, W. B. Slocombe et al. 1992. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector.

Organizations

Center for the Study of Parent Involvement
John F. Kennedy University
370 Camino Pablo
Orinda, CA 95560
Phone: 510/254-0110

Children's Defense Fund (CDF)
25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
Phone: 202/628-8787
www.childrensdefense.org

National Association of Child Advocates (NACA)
1522 K Street, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/289-0777

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
1509 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1426
Phone: 202/328-2605
www.naeyc.org/naeyc

National Committee for Children in Education
10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 301
Columbia, MD 21044
Phone: 301/977-9300

Parent Leadership Institute
P.O. Box 50492
Palo Alto, CA 94303
Phone: 415/424-8687

Parents Anonymous
675 West Foothill Blvd., Suite 220
Claremont, CA 91711-3475
Phone: 909/621-6184

On-Line Resources

Child Welfare League of America
www.cwla.org

Thomas Legislative Information
thomas.loc.gov/

U.S. House of Representatives
www.house.gov/

U.S. Senate
www.senate.gov/

Yahoo! Index to Governments
www.yahoo.com/Government/U_S_States/

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American Academy of Pediatrics (2000) *Your child's growth: Developmental milestones.* (Elk Grove, Ill.)

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2000) *Selecting appropriate toys for young children: The pediatrician's role (RE9714).* (Elk Grove, Ill.)

Association for the Education of Young Children. (1996) *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8.* (Washington, D.C.)

Family Support America. (2000) Family support and Time Dollars: How to build community using social capital. (Chicago, Ill.)

Glennan, T., and Melmed, A. (1996) *Fostering the use of educational technology: Elements of a national strategy.* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation)

McCormick Tribune Foundation. (Year unknown) *Ten things every child needs.* (Boulder, Col.)

National Network for Childcare. (2000) www.nncc.org/Child.Dev/child.dev.page.html

Chapter 4

Programs: Meeting Community Needs

Programs: Meeting Community Needs

While the previous chapter looked at core programs for family support centers, this chapter discusses how these core programs are applied and supplemented in centers seeking to address a specific social or community issue or to reach a specific population. Included are:

- school readiness and achievement
- family literacy
- preventing child abuse and neglect
- developmental disabilities / special needs
- youth development
- family health and wellness
- community economic development

While these issues are addressed by many family support centers in the course of their regular services or activities, this chapter focuses on centers for which one of these issues or populations is the central focus. These are centers that have consciously crafted their entire service menus to address a particular social issue or reach a specific group of families. While the family support center model and service menu often is adapted by these centers, the partnerships of equality and respect that are at the core of family support services remain central, as do the rest of the principles of family support practice.

Community Needs, Social Issues, and Family Support

As the eighth principle of family support practice states, family support centers are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues. In this respect, family support centers have always tailored their missions to local concerns. But over the past 10 years, as the field has matured, it has become increasingly clear that the goals of family support centers feed into strategies to address social issues—from the community level up to national and global concerns.

For example, many communities struggling to achieve a strong economic base are placing job skills and continual support for working families at the heart of their family support centers. Family-supportive early child development and learning activities help prepare children for school success and parents for involvement in schools—another larger community issue. A community-level and national concern is addressed when family support centers provide parent education and social supports in order to reduce child abuse and neglect. In communities in which gang violence or high school dropout are of concern, a family support center may want to place positive youth development at the center of its mission.

As growing research points to the importance of strong and stable family life in preventing negative outcomes and promoting positive ones, policymakers at the local, state, and national levels have increasingly invested in family support programs that are tailored to address specific social issues. Family support has been included in federal legislation in areas as diverse as economic development (Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities), child abuse and neglect (the Family Preservation and Support Services Program), and education (Headstart and Early Headstart). In state and local public policy, the inclusion of family support has been even more broad and diverse.

Whether one of the special foci covered in this chapter is right for your family support center depends on the needs and strengths of your community, the results of your strategic planning process, and the directives of your funding sources.

Adapting Versus Adding Components

Each section below begins with a discussion of how the core components offered by family support centers are adapted by centers with a special focus. Then, the discussion turns to additional services and programs that often are added to address the issue. Many of these services and programs are covered in more depth in the previous chapter or in other chapters of *Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit.*

School Readiness and Achievement

According to Legend,
If you wish to make
An impact for one year,
You plant corn.

If you wish to make
An impact for a generation,
You plant a tree.

But if you wish to make
An impact for an eternity,
You educate a child.

—Author Unknown

Many family support programs focusing on school readiness or achievement are either school-based (located in a school building) or school-linked (not located in a school, but working in partnership with a particular school). Most of them seek to meet at least one, if not several, of the following goals:

- ensuring that children enter school ready to learn
- involving parents in their children's education
- providing learning opportunities that reinforce academic experiences
- providing supportive services that enable children to concentrate on academic learning when they are in school
- building skills and habits that help children to succeed in school

Adapting Core Services

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is school readiness and achievement:

Parent Education

Parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. Parent education activities at centers focused on school readiness and achievement place priority on helping parents develop the skills and confidence they need to fulfill that role and to help their children learn.

Parents need to have information on how their children develop and learn at various ages. They should be informed about the basic areas in which their children's abilities will be tested and monitored in school, such as cognitive development, receptive language, expressive language, motor skills, and social development. The best way to ensure that parents know what will be expected of their children in school is to collaborate with the personnel of the school they will attend in providing parent education.

Centers focusing on school readiness and achievement often provide parents with opportunities to practice interacting with their children in ways that will prepare them for school in specific ways. For example, parents can learn about and practice ways to encourage their children to speak and understand words and begin to read. They can be supported in passing on their values regarding social interaction, to help prepare their children for developing peer and teacher-student relationships.

For families with children of school age, parent education programs can provide information on how to get involved with local school councils, parent-teacher associations, or school reform efforts. They can inform parents on how to help their children with homework, effectively address concerns with their children's teachers, or get their children into special education program or honors classes. It is equally important that centers focusing on school achievement help parents address issues that can keep children from focusing on school, such as drugs, teen pregnancy, gangs, television, etc.

How Our Center Does It

Parents As Teachers

With national headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri, Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home-school-community model that provides parenting education for families with children up to age three while promoting school readiness. PAT programs detect potential health and other problems early in order to prevent later difficulties in school and promote parents' attention to health, development, and school achievement. PAT features regular home visits from a parent educator focused on child-rearing skills and child development, ongoing parenting workshops, group meetings and support, information and referral, and developmental screening. In Missouri, the program is administered by all local school districts. Locally elected boards of education, comprised of citizens who serve without pay, serve as the ultimate governing board. Each district also has a PAT advisory board or steering committee whose members represent agencies and organizations that serve young children. A study of 37 diverse Missouri districts found three-year-old children scoring above national norms on measures of language and school-related success. Parent-child communication also improved, and more than half the children with developmental delays overcame them by age three.

Child Development

It is important for centers to work with both parent and child when striving to achieve the goal of school readiness and achievement. In addition to teaching parents how they can optimize their children's learning, family support centers can offer specific activities facilitated by a center staff member that will help children prepare for school. Centers should make available age-appropriate learning activities for children. These child development activities should help children reach developmental milestones in a variety of areas, including cognitive development, receptive language, expressive language, motor skills, and social development. A parent-child reading hour and games with letters can teach skills to children while showing parents ways to help their child be school-ready. For more information on child development strategies and activities, please see the previous chapter.

Life Skills

Centers focusing on school achievement and readiness may need to augment life skills activities for parents. Parents who as children did not have positive experiences in school or who do not have literacy skills may need extra support in preparing their own children to be school-ready. Services and classes could include adult basic education (ABE), preparation and support for attaining a high school equivalency degree (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and employment training. Goals for these components include developing literacy and parenting skills and improving self-esteem.

"If a mother comes to a playgroup [at the school] with her toddler, it builds up her comfort zone in the school. She'll discuss things with the parent educator, which builds a bridge for talking with teachers and being present in the classroom and on field trips. When parents are more aware of what's happening in classroom, they know what to do at home to support their children's education and development. When children know their parents are involved, it boosts their self-esteem. They want to be more active, and they learn more."

Theresa Horn, fifth-grade teacher
Hartford, Connecticut
(Horn 1999, 31)

Advocacy

Research shows that when parents and schools work together, results can be seen in higher student achievement, better attendance, and greater student interest in post-secondary education (National Research Council 1998). When parents have many different kinds of opportunities to be involved in the school, their children achieve more, and so do the schools they attend. Family support centers can contribute to student achievement by helping parents feel comfortable and empowered to become involved in the education of their children. An important way to do this is to locate the family support center at the school.

Family support centers housed in public schools can serve as an entry point into the education system for parents who have felt alienated or threatened by the school system. They allow parents to engage with the school system in a context of trust, understanding, and a joint endeavor between parents and teachers. They provide an environment in which new and very different relationships between schools and families can be realized. Lastly, these centers provide an environment in which parents can be trained as advocates for change and become involved in the larger school reform movement. Thus, school-based family support centers enable parents to acquire the resources, knowledge, and skills they will need to advocate for their children within the educational system. By addressing some of the barriers that keep parents from shaping the education system in this country, they link parents with the larger school reform movement in a long-term way.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is school readiness and achievement.

Services to Meet Basic Needs

Children and family members cannot be completely engaged in the learning process if other, more immediate, basic needs are not being met. For instance, a child who comes to school hungry cannot concentrate fully or realize his or her full potential. A child who does not have adequate clothing in the winter may become sick often, missing programs at the center and days at school. Family support centers can offer programming that addresses a family's basic needs, making it possible for the family to concentrate fully on the children's education. Centers offer food and nutritional information, clothing exchanges, and flexible funds to help families pay for utilities and other basic necessities in the case of emergencies.

Tutoring and Mentoring

Tutoring and mentoring help both the person providing and the child receiving the services. Many programs have youths tutor younger children as a way for the teens to develop their own academic skills and sense of responsibility. Others connect college students, seniors, or other adults with children for academic help as a way of involving all age groups in the center. Tutoring and mentoring are supplements to, not substitutes for, parents' involvement in their children's education.

Health and Developmental Screenings

As part of preparing children to enter school, family support centers should consider making health and developmental screenings available to participating families. Developmental disabilities or health challenges can have a large impact on a child's ability to function in school, and detecting them as early as possible gives parents time to reduce negative educational outcomes by seeking treatments and services for their children. In addition, providing services such as immunizations, which are required before entry to school, can ease the school transition.

Family Literacy

Adults often are driven to improve their literacy skills by their desire to help their children learn to read. Family literacy programs build on that motivation by connecting education for children with literacy instruction for parents. They offer:

- parent literacy components
- child literacy components (a form of child development activities)
- opportunities for parents and children to read and write together

It is important for family support centers addressing literacy to build partnerships with the staff of the local public library and schools. Being located in one of the few universally accessible resources in many communities, library staff often function as auxiliary family support staff. And school personnel can help center staff prepare and support children in meeting educational literacy requirements. Many family support centers focusing on literacy are located in schools and build parents' involvement in their children's education by fostering a positive association with the school. Others take place in the home or workplace.

For curricula that family support centers can use to ensure that their family literacy programs embody the principles of family support practice, please see the list of resources at the end of this chapter.

Adapting Core Services

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is family literacy.

Parent Education

Staff and community members need to carefully review all parent education materials to ensure that they do not present any literacy barriers to participating parents. At the same time, parent education materials can provide an important opportunity to engage parents in literacy activities involving subject matter in which they are interested and invested.

Parent-Child Activities

While all family support centers offer parent-child activities, centers focusing on family literacy tailor those activities so that they present opportunities for parents and children to practice reading and writing together. Activities include side-by-side reading, doing homework together, reading aloud, storytelling, educational field trips, and computer games. These activities reinforce the learning from child literacy and parent literacy components (see below) and build the parent-child relationship.

Life Skills

Most adults struggling with illiteracy also are struggling with a host of related life issues. Primary among those is employment. Because illiteracy is a significant barrier to employment, many adults with low or no reading skills have erratic employment histories. It is important to provide opportunities for these adults to develop the skills and knowledge they need to retain employment and be effective on the job, as well as job search skills.

Because of literacy barriers, additional life skills such as balancing a budget, shopping, and utilizing public transportation may be a challenge for these parents. Identify these issues and provide information to parents in a way that builds their reading skills while ensuring that they get the information they need to be successful parents. For example, staff from your center can go over the family's bank statements, checkbook, and bills with the parent and demonstrate balancing techniques; go to the store to shop with parents to reinforce math and reading skills; and help parents decipher public transportation maps and schedules.

Child Development

Because children whose parents have low literacy skills are likely to have less exposure to reading and writing at home than other children, it is important for family support centers focusing on family literacy to enrich the literacy components of their child development activities. These centers should not offer reading and writing as their sole child development activities, but should spend more time on them than other family support centers do. Activities can include staff reading to children as children follow along, games that involve letters, visits to the public library or from library staff, videotapes and television programs aimed at developing reading skills, older children reading to younger ones, and more. Reading and writing and the early verbal skills leading to them should be incorporated into all activities.

Resource and Referral

Families coping with illiteracy may need help accessing a number of supportive services. Because illiteracy is a significant barrier to employment, these families tend to be poor and dealing with a host of issues related to poverty. Centers focusing on family literacy should build strong collaborative relationships with job training programs, shelters, emergency assistance programs, and other local programs for families with financial needs.

How Our Center Does It

The Kenan Trust Family Literacy Model

This model emphasizes parent-and-child time, parent volunteerism in the school, and career education. Parents and children attend school in the same building. While children take part in developmental preschool activities, adult education is provided individually, from one community member to another. Thus vocational training, career counseling, and support in developing employability skills are combined with community and relationship building. Parents and teachers work together through the parent education component to design education activities that will interest the parents and the children. The Kenan Model improves parents' attitudes toward education, increases the learning skills of children, teaches parenting skills, and provides role models for parents and children.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is family literacy.

Services to Meet Basic Needs

As described above, families with literacy issues are disproportionately likely to be living in poverty. Because of this, these families may have a particular need for access to services to help them meet basic needs in times of crisis.

Parent Literacy

Parent literacy activities offered by family support centers build on parents' desire to help their children learn. These activities can include: parents reading their children's books, school notices, and report cards; parents reading brochures and other information on child development or community activities; parents writing notes to their children's teachers; parents visiting the library and learning how to use library resources; and more.

It can be very hard to identify adults who have difficulty reading. Many are ashamed and have developed ways of hiding their illiteracy in everyday life. If the center wishes to support parents in improving their reading and writing skills, staff must spend a significant amount of time establishing trust so that they open up when they are ready. Once a parent's illiteracy has been revealed, staff must find ways to bolster the parent's confidence and to acknowledge the strengths of the family. Without special efforts, these adults' feelings of shame may lead them to feel diminished by the process of initiating literacy education. Include plenty of positive feedback and opportunity for accomplishment. Once the developing readers start to experience more success, improvement itself becomes the reward.

Additional Services

Additional services that promote family literacy include:

- vision testing
- creative writing classes
- soliciting book donations from local businesses and distributing them free

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

Many family support centers are founded with the express purpose of reaching families at risk of abuse or neglect before an incident occurs. Many of the core services common to family support centers address three important risk factors often associated with child abuse and neglect—lack of parenting skills and knowledge, social isolation, and life stress overload. Parent education courses, peer-to-peer support, life skills education, and resource and referral all are important strategies for addressing these risk factors.

Risk Factors Contributing to Child Abuse and Neglect

- Parental substance abuse, mental illness, or mental retardation
- Childhood disability
- Domestic violence
- Lack of parenting skills and knowledge
- Extreme poverty
- Social isolation
- Family history of abuse
- Life stress overload

(Koralek 1992)

Increasingly, family support centers also are being asked to work with families after they have entered the child welfare system. Because family support centers work with families in relationships based on equality and respect, staff often can work with families to change the behavior that led to an incident and to develop ways of preventing abuse and neglect in the future. Many programs combine child abuse and neglect prevention services with in-depth reunification services.

Family support centers also serve families formed after a child leaves his or her birth family, such as foster families and adoptive families. They provide these families with general family support services and programs as well as mediating between a child's new families and birth family, allowing children to have a less disruptive transition.

Adapting Core Programs

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is preventing child abuse and neglect.

Parent Education

While cases of child abuse attract a large amount of public attention, most families enter the child welfare system because of child neglect. By providing parents with information about what their children need by way of supervision, nutrition, education, and other needs, family support centers can help families build strong parenting routines in order to prevent neglect.

Similarly, parent education can help parents at risk of abuse learn how to deal with frustrating episodes with their children. Learning such techniques such as how to calm an upset child, how to take a "time out" when feeling overwhelmed, and how to discipline in a non-abusive manner all can be topics of parent education activities. If abuse does occur, parent education also should cover parents' and children's rights within the child welfare system.

When a new family has been formed through foster care or adoption, family members often benefit from parent education covering attachment and bonding, responding to disruptive behavior, helping children recover from loss and disruption, and understanding their rights within the child welfare system.

Information and Referral

Connecting parents and children to resources and support is one primary way family support centers can help families at risk of neglect or abuse. Centers should recognize, however, that many of these families are coping with extreme stress, and should provide or link them to services and programs that are appropriate for them. Statistically, families at risk of abuse or neglect are more likely than the general population to be facing other serious issues, such as substance abuse and domestic violence. The center should build referral relationships with those who specialize in providing:

- psychiatric or mental health counseling services
- substance abuse treatment
- domestic violence counseling and shelters
- legal and advocacy services

Similarly, foster care and adoptive families often are dealing with non-traditional attachment issues and the strain of creating a new family structure while children are still dealing with loss, grief, and the aftermath of abuse and/or neglect. These families may need to be connected to special support groups or counselors who deal with these issues in an in-depth way.

Educate Your Staff

Family support center staff need training to meet the needs of families at risk for child abuse. All staff who are to work with families at risk of child abuse and neglect should:

- understand all mandated reporting requirements that apply to them
- be able to recognize signs of child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, and domestic violence
- understand the causes, impact, and prevalence of child abuse and neglect, and how to work with families experiencing abuse and neglect
- understand confidentiality issues, including the use of consent forms required for information sharing, and be able to explain them to families
- understand how the child protective service system in the state or county works, as well as the experiences of families who have been in it
- understand various ways of disciplining children and cultural norms concerning discipline

You should provide regular in-services or training for staff to build or refresh their knowledge in these areas and on family-supportive methods of working with families on abuse and neglect issues. Contact your child protective services department and ask if they provide any training or materials that could be helpful to your staff.

Social Network Building

Many parents and families at risk of child abuse and neglect are socially isolated and cannot or will not call upon peers for support and advice. Assistance in building social networks, one of the core services offered by family support centers, helps parents become more socially connected. These connections give parents peers to call for support and childcare in times of stress, people they can turn to for advice (on issues such as how to deal with a screaming child), and contacts who generally can make life more enjoyable and less stressful. Such peers can give real-world guidance on how they have dealt with situations and overcome difficulties, providing families with hope that they too will succeed.

Referrals to such groups as Parents Anonymous can help parents feel more connected to others who deal with similar issues and can help parents get information that is helpful to them. Centers focusing on prevention of child abuse and neglect may consider hosting Parents Anonymous groups on site.

How Our Center Does It

Parents Anonymous

The Parents Anonymous national headquarters are in Claremont, California. Weekly, ongoing Parents Anonymous groups are co-led by parents and professionally trained facilitators and are free of charge to participants. Parents and their children come together to Parents Anonymous to learn new skills, transform their attitudes and behaviors, and create long-term positive changes in their lives. While the parents are meeting, their children are engaged in Parents Anonymous children's programs to promote their healthy growth and development. Parents can join at any time and can attend for as long as they wish.

Advocacy

If the center must refer a family to child protective services, staff should be prepared to continue to advocate for the family while they are involved with the child protective services system. On an ongoing basis and in response to the family's needs, a staff member must explain to the family what they can expect to experience in the system and what their rights are. Foster care and adoptive families may also want advocacy services so that they can obtain the support they need from the system. When staff are working with a family who has been mandated to participate in the center's services because they have a case open in the child protective services system, the staff should connect with the family's caseworker in the system. When they have a relationship with the caseworker, staff increase their ability to function as advocates for the family. Family support staff, because of their relationship of trust with the family, are in a good position to help the family make the changes required in order to reunite safely.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is preventing child abuse and neglect.

Counseling / Family Preservation Services

Preventative counseling should be conducted by a qualified licensed therapist and can occur at the center or through referral. Some programs have on staff licensed social workers who are trained to provide this counseling as well as sessions following an incident of abuse. These services differ from family development counseling because they are aimed at solving a problem that goes beyond the common, everyday challenges that most families face. If the center has therapists on-site, also consider making their services available for foster care and adoptive families who need such support as well.

Family preservation services are a specific type of services that are funded through state and federal sources to prevent the placement of a child outside of his or her family's home. Government statutes determine what activities must take place if the center is to be considered as providing family preservation services. The staff hired to provide such services must be licensed by the state. To find out about licensing requirements, consult the agency in your state that is responsible for child welfare services.

How Our Center Does It

The Center for Family Life in Sunset Park
Brooklyn, New York

The Family Foster Care Program of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park has been replicated in communities throughout the nation.

The center added family foster care to its comprehensive family support services in 1989. When the city's Child Welfare Administration determines that placement outside of the family must occur, a Center for Family Life social worker is appointed to the case. He or she helps identify a family in the child's current neighborhood with whom the child can be placed and then continually meets with and supports both families. After the child returns home, the family can continue to access counseling and other services. Siblings are kept together whenever possible during placement

The program's small scale (19 families were involved in 1994), community nature, and sustained connections with both families during foster care are keys to its success. As of 1994, only four of the 90 children placed had been unable to return to their homes, and those had been adopted.

Respite

Respite services offer parents a break when they feel stressed and unable to manage their children or interact with them safely. By allowing a parent to step away when they are feeling frustrated and on-edge, programs help parents gain perspective and calm themselves down. Make respite services accessible and non-judgmental; parents should be commended for knowing when they need to step back. For more information on respite services, see the previous chapter.

24-Hour Access to Staff

Situations that lead up to abuse can happen at any time of day. Having staff available to parents 24 hours a day can prevent incidents of abuse. Consider having staff on site around the clock or, if that is not feasible, on call and reachable by phone. Provide staff with pagers so that they can maintain privacy but still be accessible.

Services to Meet Basic Needs

Many families who enter the child welfare system do so during a period of considerable financial stress. Providing some relief in the form of food, clothing, and emergency funds can help prevent incidents of neglect and abuse. When such services are provided in a comfortable place where parents' strengths are emphasized, the difficulty of asking for such help may be reduced as well.

Developmental Disabilities / Special Needs

"There is nothing more frustrating than not being able to care for your own child—or having to deal with people who don't believe you can."

—Parent, Project STAR Parents With Disabilities Project Focus Group

Families that include people with developmental disabilities and special needs have long been in the forefront of the family support movement as advocates and innovators. Many practices that are core to the family support field, such as mutual support, programmatic flexibility, family rights, and respite, were pioneered in programs serving those with disabilities. Often, these practices have been instituted as the result of the tireless advocacy of families with children with disabilities in local, state, and federal policy arenas. Family support centers have been an important part of this movement because they are places where families with special needs know they will be treated with equality and respect. The flexibility of family support programs helps these families with ever-changing conditions. Family support programs can help with the early detection of and response to special needs in childhood.

Your center can enhance parents' ability to support children with special needs, or you may serve families that include disabled parents and provide support to their children and other relatives. While this section focuses on the former, those who are caring for disabled parents should be explicitly invited to take part in all activities. In addition, their needs and programs to meet them are addressed directly with regard to life skills and adding supplemental programs, below.

Adapting Core Programs

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is supporting families that include people with developmental disabilities and special needs.

Parent Education

In addition to providing the basic information that all parents need to raise their children, your center should provide parents with information on their children's disabilities and give them strategies for dealing with the particular challenges of raising a child with a special need. This helps parents raise their children in a healthy manner and become more confident in meeting their children's needs. All parents should be given information on early signs of possible disability or special needs in their children.

Topics to cover in parent education include:

- dealing with the news that your baby needs special care
- accessing support services
- coping with disability
- obtaining a family-friendly individualized family service plan (IFSP)
- recognizing family strengths
- finding disability information
- readying a student for adult life
- obtaining quality, in-home nursing
- legal rights of students with disabilities

Child Development

Centers that focus on developmental disabilities and special needs often provide therapeutic child development services for children who have or are likely to have disabilities or special needs. These are provided by licensed, trained professionals and can include speech and language, occupational and physical, behavioral, and psychological therapy. These services are often delivered through a combination of home visiting and on-site developmental childcare and family sessions. Family support centers may choose to integrate children with special needs into other childcare classrooms when they are not engaged in therapeutic child development services. Family support centers providing these specialized services bring together childcare providers, licensed therapists, and parents to discuss the developmental progress of each child on a regular basis and to determine the best plan for the child and family. Transportation to these activities often is contracted to a company that specializes in vehicles equipped for those with disabilities.

Building Social Networks

Often, families and parents feel isolated and alone in dealing with disability. It is important to connect families experiencing disability to each other so they may receive and provide support, join together to advocate for what their children are entitled to under the law, and gain a sense of empowerment in the process.

The discovery of a disability or special need can be traumatizing for both the person with the condition and his or her family. Family members may feel a sense of guilt or shame, and may question themselves as to what they did wrong. This is natural in the course of adapting to a disability. Family support centers can help families go through the process of adapting to their special needs, which includes gaining knowledge about the disability and regaining a sense of normalcy and strength. Continued, positive, respectful interaction and reaching out to the family can help them relinquish feelings of guilt or shame and establish a community that knows and accepts them.

How Our Center Does It

The Parent Consultant Network

Davenport, Iowa

The Parent Consultant Network of the Child Health Specialty Clinics connects parents of children with special health care needs to peer paraprofessionals who serve as mentors and friends. These are parents in similar situations who have been trained, are knowledgeable about service systems, and are experienced in caring for a child with special health care needs. They emphasize the development of knowledge, confidence, and problem-solving skills and encourage an active role for parents in planning and organizing services for their children. They share with parents information and referrals to service agencies, funding sources, and parent groups; help articulate their concerns; and provide suggestions for how to solve problems.

Life Skills

Special needs do not disappear when people pass into adulthood. Family support centers can support adults with special needs through assisted living, support in finding and keeping jobs, and connections to community organizations that specialize in these areas.

Family support centers can help adults with special needs with everyday challenges. Parents with special needs raising children can benefit from core family support programs, but these may need to be adjusted depending on the particular needs of the family. For example, if a parent has a learning disability, involving that parent in the child's development of literacy skills will require adapted activities. Parents with disabilities may need additional services, such as financial aid for special equipment; physical, occupational, or psychological therapy; or housing assistance. The right mix of specialized services and core family support services can make a very effective program for those with special needs, no matter what age they are.

Information and Referral

Many families need specialized referrals to health care providers, financial assistance for special equipment, special education resources, housing assistance, and other services and resources, depending on the specific disability or special need. Your center should develop a comprehensive list of all local, state, and national resources that could possibly be needed by families with disabilities. Ask families themselves to provide the names of organizations, businesses, individuals, Internet resources, publications, audio/visual resources, and other resources that have been helpful to them. Ask health care providers and other organizations serving those with disabilities to provide their lists of resources to you. Helping families make informed decisions about where and how to get these resources can both make families feel more comfortable accessing such services and result in them receiving better services.

Advocacy

For parents with children with special needs, developing strong advocacy skills can be crucial. These children often need additional resources, such as special education or access to special medical care, in order to flourish, and getting these resources often requires navigating systems that are bureaucratic or unresponsive. It is the role of family support programs to help families get results from the systems designed to support them. Your staff should be fully aware of legislative changes that impact families receiving government support and know who to call to get results when families feel "lost" in the system. Staff should build bridges between families and the specialists trained to help them deal with disabilities and special needs.

How Our Center Does It

Sinergia, Inc.

New York

Sinergia coordinates family services and provides families and individuals with the means to empower themselves, become their own advocates, and assist other families. The program operates mainly in low-income, minority neighborhoods, which have been underserved by government and voluntary service providers. The program includes:

- **a family support/case management** program that provides direct services such as Home Care (direct assistance with homemaking and childcare) and respite
- **a parent center** to provide training, information, and advocacy to parents and to strengthen and empower grassroots parent organizations
- **a parent education/senior companion program** that helps those with developmental disabilities become better parents through parenting skills instruction, play therapy sessions, service coordination, and mentoring and companionship from volunteer senior citizens
- **the neighborhood preservation program** of the New York Division of Housing and Community Renewal, which creates quality, affordable, integrated housing for developmentally disabled individuals and their families

Involve parents in advocacy activities in response to specific family needs and parents' desires and capacities to take on leadership roles. A good place to start is by offering a support group for parents of children with disabilities. There are strong advocacy groups to which you can link parents of children with special needs; for more information, see the resource section at the end of this chapter.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is supporting families with disabilities and special needs.

Developmental Screenings, Assessments, and Evaluations

Family support centers can start early with families by facilitating early diagnosis and treatment of disabilities and special needs. Providing basic health care and developmental screenings on-site can help ensure that families will be comfortable during the screening process, receive information to help them understand the results of screening, and be treated respectfully. Early detection of developmental and other disabilities will help with the child's ability to receive the medical, educational, and social supports he or she will need to optimize development. If possible, have a child development specialist and other professionals needed to perform a comprehensive screening and assessment available regularly at the center, to make this difficult process easier for parents. You can team up with your local hospital, pediatricians, or public health nurse to co-locate services at your center.

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Housing Assistance

Many programs that work with developmentally disabled adults help them secure accessible, affordable, integrated housing. Center staff can research options for or with the individual and his or her family; research and help the individual apply for a housing subsidy from the local, state, or federal government; provide and manage housing; or refer the individual to an agency that specializes in these activities.

Respite

Family support centers can arrange for someone to care for a disabled family member while the family caregiver takes a break. By giving caregivers the opportunity to step away when they are stressed or overwhelmed, centers allow them to re-gain perspective and rest, which will enable them to continue supporting their family members in the long run. Respite helps prevent neglect and abuse.

Caregivers may feel that they are giving up or abdicating responsibility when considering respite care. You may have to convince caregivers to take advantage of respite services at first. Therefore, it is important to make these services easy to access (family members should be able to call and request easily) and provided in a non-judgmental way. Staff should always commend caretakers for knowing when they need to step back. For more information on respite services, see the previous chapter.

How Our Center Does It

Parents Helping Parents

Santa Clara, California

Parents Helping Parents is a parent-directed family support center that serves children with special needs, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Some of the center's services are funded through federal and state programs. Services include:

- **early intervention** for children ages zero to three, either after or in anticipation of a diagnosis involving special need, which consists of support groups, parent-to-parent mentoring, sibling groups, referrals and information on resources, integrated play groups, and the services below
- **sibling workshops** (including dinner) where kids talk about their feelings and experiences having a brother or sister with a disability
- **a library** of books, videos, and audio tapes on special needs as well as general child development and parenting
- **training** offering parents credentials in creating Individualized Educational Plans and in Assistive Technology
- **education resource specialists** who staff a hotline and training sessions
- **assistive technology:** information and referrals, low-cost adaption of toys to provide accessible switches, equipment exchanges, and funding information
- **a puppet troupe** that teaches about disabilities
- **learning disability simulation** in which teachers, administrators, and parents learn first-hand what it's like to have a learning disability
- **Youth Educational Advocates** upholding the special education rights of juveniles supervised by the court

Counseling

Families dealing with disability often struggle with emotional issues that they need help resolving. Referring to or having on-site counseling services by individuals who have history working with families with similar families is important. You can connect with local providers of these counseling services through your local hospital. Your center may offer a service to hospitals and clinics by hosting support groups at your sited.

Parents with children who have special needs may feel guilt, frustration, anger, and inadequacy. Coping with and working through these emotions while dealing with the stresses of parenting can be difficult. And when parents become disabled, there is a risk of children not receiving proper care. Counseling is usually required initially, but support groups can be appropriate and affordable solutions for parents dealing with long-term disabilities. Connecting with other parents, including those dealing with similar challenges, can help the parents keep the family's situation in context and understand what it means to provide adequate care for children.

Services for Children with Disabled Parents

Parenting children can be especially difficult for those with limited accessibility, communication mechanisms, sensory impairment, or other issues created by disability. Too often, these parents receive the societal message that they are unfit or somehow irresponsible in choosing to be parents. Family support centers that work with these parents help them not only address concrete challenges, but counteract negative social messages through counseling as well as through continued friendship and acceptance at the center.

Children with parents or siblings with disabilities often face feelings of shame, resentment, and guilt. They may be teased at school or be angry that they must take care of their family members. Either directly or through referrals, your center can provide children with respite care in the home of another family or at the center, a safe environment in which to talk through their feelings, and neutral moderation to help negotiate new roles, especially as they become teens. It can be very helpful to link these children with others in similar situations.

Youth Development

Family support centers that focus on youth development ease and support the transition between childhood and adulthood, building youths' sense of self while reaffirming their connection to their families and to society.

Family support centers can help parents: understand the changes their adolescents are facing, facilitate age-appropriate guided independence for them, and connect and communicate with them. Centers also can provide opportunities, such as support groups, for parents of adolescents to encourage each other and exchange practical advice and can link families who are struggling with the transitions of adolescence to counseling services.

Your family support center also can directly support youths as they approach adulthood, inviting adolescents through your doors during the after-school hours and providing positive youth development activities. As a center focusing on youth development, your advisory council or board should have some slots for youth representatives.

Adapting Core Programs

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is youth development.

Parent Education

Family support centers can assist parents in building on their parenting skills as their children mature. Classes and support groups can help parents learn about the changes that their adolescents are experiencing; the support, discipline, and autonomy that adolescents need; and strategies for building strong parent-teen relationships. The center can invite community experts in drug abuse prevention, pregnancy prevention, and other relevant issues identified by parents and teens to be guest speakers. Support groups and informal parent-to-parent time allow older parents to share their lessons learned with those whose children are reaching adolescence.

Best Practices in Youth Development Activities

- **Adult support, structure, and expectations: A caring adult support person or mentor; time to develop trust and relationships**
- **Caring support coupled with set boundaries (structure) and personal responsibility**
- **High expectations; challenging relevant to young person's needs and strengths**
- **Utilizing youth as resources**
- **Age-appropriate activities tied to knowledge of youth development**
- **Small, family-like settings**
- **Support and follow-up: case management and faithfully implemented individual development plans**
- **On-going student/youth assessment for improved instruction or service delivery**
- **A continuum of activities that build positively over time**

(James 1999)

Family Development Activities

The relationship a youth has with her or his parents is one of the strongest predictors of his or her success as an adolescent and as an adult. Because family support programs form such strong partnerships with parents and can form strong relationships with youths, they are in an ideal position to help bridge the gap between parents and adolescents. By bringing parents and preteens together through activities, a family support center can help build a foundation of strong parent-youth relationships that will last through the conflicts and difficulties that are inherently part of adolescence. Activities can include:

- family nights at the center that offer teen and adult activities, such as music and dancing, food, movies, and games
- father-child or mother-child outings
- critiquing movies together
- rating local restaurants
- playing or watching sports
- teens interviewing their parents or grandparents about life when they were teenagers, and playing back or reading these in a group
- teens creating a bulletin board of pictures or words showing how their parents have influenced them (leave up for parents to see)
- interfamily, intergenerational support groups where members of different families discuss their issues and experiences related to adolescence

How Our Center Does It

Asian Pacific Family Support Center
San Jose, California

The Asian Pacific Family Support Center helps immigrant parents connect with their children and adolescents who have become accustomed to mainstream American society. The center serves Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese families. It offers youth activities such as language classes and traditional dance classes to help children understand their parents' values, narrow the parent-child gap, provide youths with cultural pride, and strengthen their sense of self-esteem and identity. The center also provides activities that enhance parent-child interaction, such as Vietnamese flower arranging. For the first half-hour of the weekly class, parents and their children meet as a group to discuss listening and communication skills and the importance of celebrating their relationships. The last hour of the class is a lesson in flower arrangement, during which parents and children practice their new communication skills as they create a floral centerpiece together.

Life Skills

To successfully make the transition to adulthood and to have a safe and enjoyable adolescence, kids must develop critical thinking skills. Through role playing, peer counseling, literature and film discussion groups, and other activities, your center can provide youths with the information and practice they need in order to think through solutions and alternatives in everyday life. Role-play tough situations to prepare youths for the challenges they face with peer pressure, violence, and drug or alcohol abuse. Adolescents can put on a play dramatizing these situations for which they write the scripts, act out the parts, organize the production, and advertise the show. The same can be done with music, poetry, painting, and other artistic media.

Family support centers play a strong role in helping teens prepare for and develop positive attitudes about: the world of work, community and civic engagement, parenting, and taking responsibility for one's own housing, bills, housekeeping, etc. Activities for older adolescents can progressively include job-focused mentoring with community members, tours of area colleges with parents, parent-child classes in household finances, and more. Many centers appoint a staff member who relates well to youths as "youth coordinator" to ensure that, when youths are undergoing difficult changes in their relationships with adults, including their parents, there is always an adult for them to turn to.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is youth development.

Positive Youth Development Activities

Youth-only activities can supplement parent-child activities and provide positive alternatives to unsupervised after-school time. Youths must take leadership roles in planning these activities in order to retain their interest and investment. Some possibilities are:

- Host art activities where youths write, draw, or make collages showing things they like to do and things they feel they are good at. Discuss these and point out positive characteristics they've left out. Display the art at the center.

- Provide homework time. Have staff or volunteers on-hand to help, but encourage youths to help each other as well.
- Throw cultural appreciation days. Youths conduct research and write or create art showing key aspects of their cultures, including ethnic, geographic, religious, and other information. The research can involve interviewing elders.
- Facilitate peer support groups or rap sessions to allow adolescents to check in and discuss their concerns, challenges, and successes. These help youths develop listening skills, empathy for others, awareness that they are not alone in their struggles, and problem-solving techniques.

How Our Center Does It

Family Focus Our Place

Evanston, Illinois

Students come to Family Focus Our Place for three to four hours a day, following their day at school. In a classroom with others in their age group, a staff member leads activities that involve drug and HIV education, peer discussion sessions, crafts, and homework help. Staff focus on building on each adolescent's strengths to increase self-esteem, and youths take part in activities such as concerts and talent shows that help them discover their strengths. In addition, many students are supported in working summer jobs. For adolescents in schools that emphasize only high academic performance and achievement in sports, Family Focus offers an opportunity to be recognized for other valuable assets. For African America students, the program also is a source of positive cultural identity and pride. The walls are covered with pictures of and quotations from important African and African American leaders; much of the art is by students and depicts African Americans studying and graduating.

Civic Involvement Activities

Centers can develop adolescents' interconnectedness to society and the need for community responsibility. These are especially important components in communities working to end gang violence and youth crime. Providing opportunities for youths to get involved helps them develop a sense of attachment and commitment to and responsibility for their most important environments—family, school, peers, and community—and helps them see that they can shape the world in which they live. Activities can include:

- mentoring and tutoring children
- voting in mock elections
- publicizing center events and programs
- holding a teen fashion show from which ticket revenue is donated to a retirement home
- painting a cultural mural where graffiti is present
- organizing speak-outs about social issues and policies affecting youth and their communities where youths are encouraged to draw connections between their experiences and local, state, and federal policy decisions
- letter-writing campaigns in which teens write to senators and representatives when they feel strongly about an issue

In-Depth Counseling

Youths can be at a high risk of developing psychological and emotional problems because of the complicated changes they are going through physically, socially, and mentally. Family support centers focusing on youth development either hire licensed social workers or psychologists or refer families off-site for counseling and therapy when a youth is having an especially difficult time. Different from family development activities, these sessions intensely focus on complex problems such as depression, eating disorders, and unusual acting out that goes beyond the common, everyday challenges most families face. If specialized staff are not on site at all times, your center should keep a list of qualified therapists who specialize in these areas to whom staff may make referrals when these problems arise.

How Our Center Does It

Valued Youth Program

San Antonio, Texas

The Valued Youth Program arose in response to high drop-out rates among Latino youth. It pairs at-risk adolescents with elementary students in need of help with their school work. One day a week, the youths attend a class in which they learn tutoring skills. Then, each youth works with one or two elementary school students chosen by teachers. Tutors work under the supervision of the classroom teacher and are paid minimum wage. They also hear guest speakers from the community, go on field trips to observe professionals at work, and write essays about their tutoring experiences. Through the program, youths learn about the world of work and financial management, improve their communication and writing skills, and develop a sense of self-worth. In the process, their grades improve, and drop-out rates plummet. In the program's first 11 years of operation, fewer than 2% of all tutors dropped out of school, compared with general rates of 80% among area Latino communities.

Family Health and Wellness

Normal core components of family support centers alone produce significant positive health outcomes. Educating parents about the needs of their children (including nutritional, behavioral, and developmental needs) can prevent child neglect and abuse, improving the health of the family. And infant health screenings, immunizations, and other services that most family support centers provide contribute directly to health.

However, some family support centers—in particular those serving populations in which there is a predominance of special needs or negative health outcomes—may wish to make promoting health their central approach to supporting and strengthening families.

Family support centers that focus on health play a plethora of roles, including:

- identifying common preventable health problems in the community and taking steps to prevent them
- identifying special needs and health conditions in families that require treatment
- encouraging and helping families to obtain treatment and therapies
- advocating for families within the health care system

Working collaboratively with health care providers such as pediatricians, nurses, public health nurses, and staff of hospitals and clinics as well as public health agency administrators, insurance providers, and others involved in the health care system is crucial to ensuring the health of families. Your center may be able to link with one of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's many projects or utilize their publications and resources in this area. See the resources at the end of this chapter for more information.

Location

Providing health care on site mitigates many of the barriers families experience in accessing health care. Families who find large public hospitals intimidating feel more welcome at their familiar support centers. On-site health care also enables health care providers and family support practitioners to work together to best meet the needs of families. Funding constraints usually limit the amount of health care services that can be provided in the family support center, and centers have developed various strategies to overcome that barrier.

Co-location is one popular strategy in which a family support center shares building space with a health care provider, Medicaid administrator, WIC provider, or other resource provider to which families served by the center need access. This enables families to meet all of their needs with one visit to the site. While co-location does not necessarily result in collaboration among providers in the building, it does tend to foster partnerships, which your center can build by using common intake forms, offering comprehensive orientation sessions for the entire building, or coordinating joint services (such as support groups that include families from more than one program). Co-located programs may also choose to share resources such as childcare facilities, office equipment, and clerical staff.

In addition or as an alternative, many family support centers partner with local health centers to bring in a physician one day per week to conduct the most basic preventive health practices. Your center may require more frequent visits or visits from different health professionals, depending upon the population you serve. In any case, the fewer services are available on-site, the more important are the center's referral and advocacy activities and thus the staff's relationships with and connections to off-site providers.

Adapting Core Programs

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is family health and wellness.

Resource and Referral

Family support centers that do not provide health care services on-site or that provide only select services on-site develop close relationships with off-site health care providers so that they can refer families for preventive, ongoing, and emergency health services. The key is to make access as easy as possible for families. Your center should have a list of medical professionals whom they can call to ask questions regarding specific health issues that are prevalent in your community and should receive ongoing training in detecting the possibility of these health problems. When screenings or other preventive health care services are provided at the center, staff help families access follow-up ongoing care with pediatricians, hospitals, or specialists as needed. They also help families locate funds for needed health care through programs such as the federal Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Centers can even enroll families for CHIP on site.

Parent Education

Parent education at centers focusing on health and wellness should provide parents with specific information on the health concerns prevalent in the community and should provide parents with supportive peer groups and one-on-one sessions to discuss sensitive health issues. Parent education can be provided by a combination of staff from within the center and outside experts. There is a multitude of health topics that can be covered, and your community's specific concerns should top the list. Prevention topics to start with include:

- prenatal care
- proper nutrition for children, youths, adults, and seniors
- exercise
- family planning and teen pregnancy prevention
- preventing sexually transmitted diseases
- risks of tobacco, drug, and alcohol abuse
- emotional health
- stress management

How Our Center Does It

Family Wellness Project
Chicago, Illinois

A collaboration between the Community Economic Development Association (CEDA) and the Illinios Department of Human Services, the Family Wellness Project turns parents into Peer Health Educators. Individuals who have influence in their communities are trained to provide workshops, presentations, and one-on-one sessions on healthy behaviors and prevention issues related to parenting. After three years as Peer Educators, parents can become certified Preventionists through the Illinois state government. Preventionists are professionals who work on teams with staff, parents, community leaders, and social service providers at every Head Start agency. The project both promotes family health and generates jobs and careers for parents, and parents involved get to see how they are impacting the health of individuals, families, and the community.

Life Skills

Life skills activities can help prevent and put a stop to behaviors that are detrimental to family and individual health, such as family violence, drug and alcohol addiction, and eating disorders. Activities can include support groups, educational sessions, counseling, and other programs on these subjects. Family support centers focusing on health provide parents and youths with ways to cope with difficulties in their lives that do not damage their health or the health of their families.

Advocacy

Families who do not have a "medical home" can be at risk of developing negative health outcomes (Sia 1998, 7). Family support centers can create such a medical home for each family—a centralized place of coordination for all of the services addressing the medical and nonmedical needs of the child and family within their own community. Family support center staff help ensure that the health care that families receive is of high quality. Staff who suspect that a family is receiving inferior care should advocate for that family by contacting the health care provider and, if needed, attending health care appointments with the family or family member. In addition, families can be provided with the training and tools to advocate for themselves in larger systems, including both private and public health systems.

Parent-Child, Child Development, and Youth Development Activities

In centers focusing on health, the activities regularly offered by family support centers—such as family nights, after-school programs, and child development activities—should be geared toward solving or preventing community health problems. To prevent heart disease, sports and other physical activities that build cardiovascular fitness can be emphasized. Children can learn about nutrition by studying the food groups and following simple recipes. Youths can take part in walk-a-thons or bike-a-thons to raise funds for their own programs. Creativity and community input are the keys to adapting these programs so that they meet community health needs.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is health and family wellness. See the beginning of this section regarding methods of delivering these services.

Well-Child Check-Ups

These check-ups can include immunizations, annual physicals, and developmental screenings. Providing such a service can make a big difference for families who for a variety of reasons utilize health services only when they or their children are very sick, and often at a hospital emergency room. Encouraging families to take advantage of preventive services can help them catch health and developmental problems before they escalate.

How Our Center Does It

CHIP of Virginia

CHIP of Virginia, with headquarters in Roanoke, has 11 sites serving 4,200 children in 2,400 families. The program enhances child health and family self-sufficiency and improves the relationship between hard-to-reach families and the health care system.

Home visiting is conducted by a team of a community health nurse and a lay home visitor with community experience, who work with the family to develop a health care plan for each child, focusing on preventive care such as well child care, immunizations, and dental care. They help the family carry out the plan by helping them arrange transportation to appointments and prepare questions to ask or information to share with the provider. Working as a team with health care practitioners across the community, CHIP can assist a family with everything from Medicaid eligibility and enrollment to managing care for children with special health needs. They also assess homes for safety and assist in correcting unsafe conditions.

One public health nurse and two home visitors serve a caseload of about 150 children. CHIP targets children from birth to age six, with family income up to 150% of the federal poverty level, who are experiencing barriers to care and who are referred from many points within the community.

The program has produced increased immunization rates, effective linking with a medical home in the private sector for both mothers and children, and increased employment of mothers.

Specialized Home Visits

For new parents, home visits can provide important support. Family support practitioners and nurses or other health professionals can conduct team visits to provide counseling and/or emotional support, support regarding breastfeeding difficulties, and general medical information on child development and the post-partum period. Home visits from a pair of health care practitioners with different areas of specialization can be useful for parents of children who have special health care and/or developmental needs.

Events

Family support centers can host health fairs and other special health events throughout the year where families can access cholesterol checks, flu shots, blood pressure tests, eye and hearing exams, and other prevention-oriented care from health professionals. Centers can also sponsor workshops on healthy eating, the benefits of exercise, and other health topics. These events should be planned based on the specific health issues present in the community.

WIC Services

For low-income women, infants, and children up to age five, the federal Women, Infants and Children program provides food, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care. Your family support center can increase families' access to WIC by having a WIC worker stationed at your location or by having application forms on-hand and a good relationship with the local office of the state agency that administers WIC. See the Resources section for contact information.

How Our Center Does It

Greenwood Community Children's Center

Greenwood, South Carolina

The Greenwood Community Children's Center provides a stable, professional medical home for children and families, including the medically indigent and those with special needs. Its nurtures community partnerships in order to surround each family and child with a team of people who can help them grow up healthy. In one example of successful collaboration, a public health nurse is stationed at the Children's Center to provide WIC services and public Family Support Services (FSS) to eligible families. Families can therefore receive a variety of services under one roof, rather than making separate trips to the hospital to receive WIC services. The nurse also conducts home visits when babies are born to assess the mother and infant and provide information on numerous topics regarding their health. The center collaborates with the state and county departments of health and social services, public and private schools, churches and many other public and private family support organizations to provide parenting classes, support groups, nutrition classes, and other services.

Community Economic Development

Families in low-income communities often face challenges due to high unemployment, poor housing, and a general lack of economic opportunities. In these communities, it is difficult for family support centers to strengthen and support families without addressing economic issues. The well-being of children and families is greatly influenced by their ability to obtain resources that cost money: nutritious food, safe housing, clothing, and even education (through well-funded school districts).

Family support centers can improve families' economic circumstances through their own programs and by infusing family support principles into existing community economic development projects. Many centers across the country have initiated, coordinated, and partnered in community economic development. These centers collaborate with community development corporations, community development financial institutions, and others to help families escape poverty. Examples of collaborative projects include linking individuals to employment opportunities and housing, creating bartering networks, and starting local enterprises.

Adapting Core Programs

Below are some ways in which your center may choose to adapt its core family support services if the focus of your center is community economic development.

Life Skills

Most family support centers that are implementing life skills programming are doing so out of community economic development concerns, so much of this material is covered in the previous chapter. But the broad category of "life skills" may need to be narrowed when the center has made a decision to focus most of its energy on community economic development. Many such centers locate as many life skills activities as possible at the family support center, and take pains to gear these activities toward job preparation and retention. These are discussed in the supplemental services section below. In addition, life skills activities can cover:

- decision-making and goal-setting activities that lead parents to envision a positive future and determine the steps for getting there
- classes and mentoring on managing household finances
- shopping trips to help families select inexpensive, nutritious foods
- mentoring parents to locate and keep affordable, safe house
- assistance creating résumés and filling out job applications
- interview preparation and practice
- GED and ESL classes
- job training in basic skills such as computer use, typing, or interpersonal relations
- job training and mentoring to prepare for specific careers in which local job opportunities exist

How Our Center Does It

Cleveland Works
Ohio

Cleveland Works provides a comprehensive family support approach to working with families while promoting community economic development. The program offers:

- **job preparation activities covering job readiness, basic education, personal development, occupational skills, and training**
- **family development including on-site childcare, activities promoting child development and family management, and preventative health care education**
- **legal services including education, counseling, and advocacy**
- **a pre-trial diversion and alternative sentencing project for unemployed or marginally employed adult felony offenders**
- **customized advocacy activities such as voter registration support**

The program is evaluated not only with respect to its job placement and retention statistics, which are high, but by the overall quality of life for families, which also is improved following the start of program participation.

Life skills programming also includes helping parents and youths turn their experiences into marketable skills by hiring them to provide childcare or other services, placing them in paraprofessional positions, and appointing them to boards or leadership councils.

Information and Referral

In addition to helping participants gain the knowledge and skills for employment on-site, family support centers focusing on community economic development connect families with resources in the community, including job training agencies. These referrals usually are not one-sided; family support centers provide ongoing services that keep families strong and therefore able to stay in the work force and should receive referrals as well. Centers act as employment brokers, establishing official connections to employers and combining training, job counseling, and support services such as childcare to improve their participants' success with employment.

When a participant is unemployed, the center should help him or her access the benefits (such as unemployment insurance) to which he or she is entitled. Centers also should help families apply for the Earned Income Credit (EIC), a federal income tax benefit that offers low-income families a reduction the amount of tax owed or even tax refunds.

Families having difficulty paying bills can benefit when family support centers partner with utility companies. In some communities, companies refer families who are having difficulty paying to family support centers for services and programs. The companies see that these services will strengthen the family and increase their chances of collecting past due amounts; in exchange, companies distribute literature on child development and other topics with bills or even provide funding to centers.

Finally, centers should keep information on housing assistance available through state and federal housing departments and charitable organizations. Have information on SRO's (Single Room Occupancy hotels), short and long-term leases, and information on special programs for first-time home buyers that may be available through your state housing department.

Social Network Building

In addition to regular opportunities for families to meet and support each other, many family support centers focusing on community economic development offer:

- mutual assistance programs, which facilitate the exchange of volunteer services between residents
- community currency, which is local "money" that is created, defined, and backed by the labor of local residents and can be exchanged only within the community (Family Support America 2000)

Both facilitate social connections, allow people to access the resources they need without paying cash, and build the community's recognition of the value of each member. They also help people further develop skills that may be applicable in the larger career market.

How Our Center Does It

The Time Bank Cooperative at Children's Services of Sno Valley

North Bend, Washington

Children's Services of Sno Valley coordinates the Time Bank in addition to providing comprehensive family support programs and activities. The Time Bank is a bartering system in which members trade their time and skills rather than cash. A computer database is used to keep track of skills and goods offered by specific people and organizations; this is used to match residents needing these goods and services with those who can provide them. Volunteers use the database like a bank, to keep track of deposits and withdrawals of goods and services, which are quantified by amounts of time spent to produce them. Participants are required to attend an orientation meeting before a Time Exchange can take place. At the orientation new members fill out an application and learn how to make a Time Exchange. Meetings are held once a month, and childcare is provided. The Time Bank Cooperative is sponsored by an organization called PalladiuM.

Child Development Activities

Parents have difficulty holding steady employment when they do not have access to regular, quality activities for their children to take part in while they work or take part in job preparation. Family support centers focusing on community economic development provide or arrange for childcare and child development activities. In addition, many centers train community members to provide childcare as a career by hiring and promoting them on-site or by providing training in starting and running a home childcare center.

Advocacy

Advocacy in a family support center focused on community economic development often involves organizing and empowering parents to make improvements in the community's physical or social aspects. Centers can host and facilitate meetings where residents make a plan of action regarding an aspect of the community that needs to change, build coalitions to confront delinquent landlords, create dialog between policymakers and residents, and invite policymakers to conduct site visits to the community to better understand family and community needs and strengths. Improvement efforts may target improvements in infrastructure, such as street lighting, roads, traffic management, sewers, power, and other systems that can make the community a safe, healthy place to raise a family. They may involve building more affordable housing, renovating existing housing, improving subs-standard public schools, and any other projects that are needed in order for families to flourish.

Parent Education

Parent education in family support centers that focus on community economic development must be adapted to help parents find creative, safe ways to parent effectively even as they confront economic hardship. For example, nutrition information should focus on providing for the whole family's needs while saving money; activities could include trips to the food store with a nutritionist, parent educator, or mentor knowledgeable in this area. Subjects should support ongoing fiscal solvency for families and family skills that may suffer when poverty is present.

Supporting families during community economic development means being responsive to work schedules that may vary widely from week to week. This may be accomplished by overlapping childcare times and parent education sessions slightly and co-locating these activities, so that parents need only make one trip.

Your family support center should provide ongoing training to staff of the center's partners who provide job training and other services, to ensure that every encounter with parents is used to enforce the parent education curriculum that the center has chosen.

Adding Supplementary Services

Below are some services that may be important to add if the focus of your center is community economic development.

Enterprise Development

Family support centers can help communities and individual families create for-profit enterprises that generate income, create jobs, and provide needed services. In addition, centers can help develop cooperatives—enterprises that are owned by individuals who run the business in a democratic fashion. Profit may not be the chief goal; rather, co-ops exist primarily to provide needed services or products and to create jobs. Some businesses created as enterprises or cooperatives by or in cooperation with family support centers include:

- childcare centers
- farms
- taxi-cab services
- clothing stores and tailoring services
- computer refurbishing and recycling

The family support center can play many roles in the creation of these opportunities: training families on how to create small businesses (Else 1997, 50), generating ideas for businesses among families participating in the center, helping families identify skills and products that they can contribute and build, providing meeting places, spreading the word about the project, and much more. Centers should look to those with for-profit experience to join the team. These partners can include:

- local businesspeople
- employers (including the service sector, technological firms, utility companies, farmers, manufacturers, and others)
- temporary employment agencies
- job training providers
- childcare providers
- chambers of commerce
- university programs dealing with economics and development
- banks

How Our Center Does It

Highland Food Cooperative

Gastonia, North Carolina

Part of Highland Family Support Center, the Highland Food Cooperative contributes to the center's mission of enabling residents who receive public assistance to become economically self-sufficient and provide food to their families.

Through on-the-job training, over a two-week period, participants learn managerial skills and how to operate a cash register, stock shelves, and take inventory. They earn $15 worth of groceries for every three hours they work. Participants also attend job readiness workshops, where they develop résumé-writing and interviewing skills. The store manager contacts area stores to research job openings and determine the amount of training and preparation candidates will need in order to qualify. After training, the manager assists participants in locating employment, escorts some to interviews, and provides follow-up support after placement. The center also provides access to: transportation, computer classes, office skills training, GED classes, and life skills workshops.

Employment Training and Preparation

Through referral or on site, family support centers help family members gain the skills they need in order to get and keep jobs by providing activities such as:

- assistance creating résumés and filling out job applications
- interview preparation and practice
- GED and ESL classes
- job training in basic skills such as computer use, typing, or interpersonal relations
- job training and mentoring to prepare for specific careers in which local job opportunities exist
- mentoring by people in the work force

Family support staff can present to employers the strengths of the families they serve and build partnerships in which employers train participating parents and, in turn, gain a prepared and supported workforce.

Micro-Loans

Centers focusing on community economic development can make or facilitate loans to families who otherwise would not qualify for them. Families can use these to get through times of financial hardship; invest in transportation, the purchase of a home, or other purchases that contribute to fiscal health; or start small businesses. The entity providing these loans is often a community development financial institution (CDFI) or a credit union. The center can refer families to these institutions, provide references to show the lending institution that the family is prepared to pay the money back, deposit money for loans into a special credit union account, help families fill out paperwork, and provide support and follow-up to ensure that families stay current with loan payments (Benedict 1997, 15; Hochman 1997, 17).

How Our Center Does It

The Family Loan Program

Santa Clara County, California

Part of the Adult and Child Guidance Center, this pilot program helps working families maintain economic stability by loaning them money with low interest rates to cover job-related expenses. These loans help families become stable and self-sufficient. They range from $100 to $3,000 and can cover car purchase, repair, or registration; deposits to secure housing; childcare; and other immediate needs. Many of the participants use some of the money to take money-management courses. In order to qualify, a parent must have been employed three months or longer in his or her current job, there must be one or more children under the age of 17 living at home, and the family must demonstrate the ability to make modest monthly payments on the loan. Staff provide referrals to meet needs that cannot be met by the Family Loan Program. In a time in which self-sufficiency is a necessity, the Family Loan Program has become an important ally for families in economic need. It offers not just an emergency loan or a quick fix to a bad situation but, for many, the beginning of a new way of life.

Resources

School Readiness and Achievement

Publications

FRCA Report: Family Support and School-Linked Services
Vol. 12, Nos. 3-4. 1993. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

From Communities to Capitols: State Experiences with Family Support
G. Koser, ed. 1996. Chicago, Ill: Family Support America.

Heart Start: The Emotional Foundations of School Readiness
1992. Washington, D.C.: Zero to Three.

The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners
The National Education Goals Panel. 1998. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office.

Ready to Succeed: The Lasting Effects of Early Relationships
1998. Chicago, Ill. and Washington, D.C.: Ounce of Prevention and Zero to Three.

Turning the Tides of Exclusion: A Guide for Educators and Advocates for Immigrant Students
1999. Oakland, Calif.: California Tomorrow.

Organizations

Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Ste. 310
Washington, DC 20036
202/822-8405
Fax: 202/872-4050
www.iel.org

MegaSkills Education Center of the Home and School Institute
1500 Massachusetts Ave.
Washington, DC 20005
202/466-3633
www.megaskillshsi.org

National Association of Partners in Education
209 Madison St., Ste. 401
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/836-4880
www.napehq.org

National Association of State Boards of Education
Coordinated Services for Children
1012 Cameron St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/684-4000
www.nasbe.org

Quality Education for Minorities Network
1818 N St. NW, Ste. 350
Washington, DC 20036
202/659-1818
qemnetwork.qem.org

Zero to Three
2000 14th St. N, Ste. 380
Arlington, VA 22201
703/528-4300
www.zerotothree.org

On-Line Resources

America Goes Back to School
www.ed.gov/Family/agbts

Parent Soup Site for Parents of School-Aged Children
www.parentsoup.com/community/schoolage.html

ReadyWeb—ERIC/EECE Documents On School Readiness
ericeece.org/eeceweb.html

Family Literacy

Publications

Children, Parents, and Families: An Annotated Bibliography on Literacy Development In and Out of Program Settings
By V. Gadsden. 1994. NCAL Report TR94-04. Philadelphia, Penn.: National Center on Adult Literacy, University of Pennsylvania.

The Family Literacy Answer Book
1997. Louisville, Ky.: National Center for Family Literacy.

Let's Read: 101 Ideas To Help Your Child Learn To Read and Write
By M. Behm and R. Behm. Bilingual Edition. 1995. Bloomington, Ind.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication; Sponsoring Agency: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Parent Time Curriculum Guide: A Learning Activities Guide for the PACE Family Literacy Program
By L. Cramer. 1991. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Organizations

American Library Association
Public Information Office
50 East Huron St.
Chicago, IL 60611
312/944-6780 or 800/545-2433
www.ala.org

Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
1112 16th Street, NW
Suite 340
Washington, DC 20036
202/955-6158
Fax: 202/955-8084
www.barbarabushfoundation.com

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
PO Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
302/731-1600
Fax: 302/731-1057
www.reading.org

National Center for Family Literacy
Waterfront Plaza, Suite 200
325 West Main Street
Louisville, KY 40202-4251
502/584-1133
www.famlit.org

National Institute For Literacy
800 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006-2712
202/632-1500
800/228-8813 (hotline)
Fax: 202/0632-1512
www.nifl.gov

On-Line Resources

International Literacy Institute and National Center on Adult Literacy
literacyonline.org

National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education
www.cal.org/ncle/

Parents and Children Together Online Magazine
www.lacnyc.org

Child Abuse and Neglect

Publications

America's Family Support Magazine: Adoption and Foster Care
Vol. 18, No. 2. 1999. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

CWLA Standards of Excellence for Services for Abused or Neglected Children and Their Families
1998. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

CWLA Standards for Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families with Children.
1989. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

FRCA Report: Protecting Children and Supporting Families
Vol. 16, Nos. 1-2. 1997. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Planning, Funding, and Implementing a Child Abuse Prevention Project
By R. L. Dorman, D. J. Moore, C. Schaerfl-Murphy, and S. A. Spottsville. 1989.
Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

Organizations

American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children
407 S. Dearborn, Ste. 1300
Chicago, IL 60605
312/554-0166
www.apsac.org

Children's Defense Fund
122 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20005
202/628-8787
www.childrensdefensefund.org

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
440 First Street, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20001-2085
202/638-2952
Fax: 202/638-4004
www.cwla.org

The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect
330 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20447
800/394-3366 or 703/385-7565
Fax: 703/385-3206
nccanch@calib.com

Prevent Child Abuse America
200 South Michigan Avenue
Seventeenth Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-4357
312/663-3520
Fax: 312/939-8962
www.childabuse.org

On-Line Resources

American Humane Association
www.amerhumane.org/aha

Family Violence Prevention Fund
www.fvpf.org/fund

Global ChildNet (Global Child Health Society)
www.gcnet.org/gcnet

Developmental Disabilities / Special Needs

Publications / Videos

A/Ddvantage
Print and cassette periodical of: Clearinghouse on Aging and Developmental Disabilities, University of Akron, Ohio.

Belonging and Becoming: What Families Need To Know About Aging and Developmental Disabilities
1999. Akron, Ohio: Clearinghouse on Aging and Developmental Disabilities at the University of Akron.

FRCA Report: Family Support and Health Care
Vol. 17, Nos. 2-3. 1998. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Family Matters
Periodical. Washington, D.C.: National Resource Network for Child and Family Mental Health Services Business Group on Health.

National Information Center for Children and Youth (NICHCY) With Disabilities News Digest
Periodical. Washington, D.C.: NICHCY.

Organizations

American Association of People with Disabilities
1819 H Street NW, Suite 330
Washington, DC 20006
800/840-8844
aapd@aapd.com
www.aapd-dc.org

American Association of Retired Persons' Disability Initiative
AARP Membership Communications
601 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20049
800/424-3410
member@aarp.org

Council for Disability Rights
205 West Randolph, Suite 1650
Chicago, IL 60606
(312) 444-9484
TDD: 444-1967
Fax: 444-1977
answerwoman@disabilityrights.org
www.disabilityrights.org

Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
102 Pattee Hall
150 Pillsbury Dr. SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612/624-6300
ici@mail.ici.coled.umn.edu.
www.ici.coled.umn.edu

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
800/695-0285
nichcy@aed.org.
www.nichcy.org/

Internet Resources

The Americans with Disabilities Act Homepage
http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm

Forgotten Kids—Disability Links Page
http://www.mindspring.com/~l-mills/links.html

Youth Development

Publications

FRCA Report: Youth Development
Vol. 17, No. 1. 1998. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Family Support and Working with Adolescents Fact Sheet
1998. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Get Organized: A Guide to Preventing Teen Pregnancy
1999. Washington, D.C.: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Great Transitions
1995. Waldorf, Md.: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

Reconnecting Youth & Community: A Youth Development Approach
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. 1996. Silver Spring, Md.: National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth.

Some Things Do Make a Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Evaluations of Youth Programs and Practices
Donna Walker James, ed. 1999. Washington, D.C.: American Youth Policy Forum

The Troubled Journey
By Peter Benson. 1990. Minneapolis, Minn.: SEARCH Institute.

Organizations

Boys & Girls Clubs of America
National Headquarters
1230 W. Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30309
404/815-5700
www.bgca.org

Center for Youth Development and Policy Research
1875 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20009-1202
202/884-8266

National Network for Youth
1319 F St., NW, Ste. 401
Washington, DC 20004
202/783-7949
www.nn4youth.org

National Resource Center for Youth Services
College of Continuing Education
University of Oklahoma
202 W. 8th St.
Tulsa, OK 74119
918/585-2986
www.nrcys.ou.edu

National Youth Development Information Center
1319 F Street, NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20004
877/NYDIC-4-U
Fax: 202/393-4517
www.nydic.org

SEARCH Institute
700 South 3rd St., Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415
800/888-7828
Fax: 612/376-8956
www.search-institute.org

YMCA of the USA
To find the YMCA in your community, visit:
www.ymca.net

On-Line Resources

Foundation of America—Youthlink
http://www.youthlink.org

University of Minnesota Children, Youth, and Families Consortium
http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/youth

Youth Info, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
http://www.youth.os.dhhs.gov/

Family Health and Wellness

Publications

Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents
By Morris Green, M.D., ed. 1994. Alexandria, Va.: National Maternal and Child Health Clearinghouse.

FRCA Report: Family Support and Health Care
Vol. 17, Nos. 2-3. 1998. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Families and Health
By W. J. Doherty and T. L. Campbell. 1998. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, Inc.

Free and Low-Cost Health Insurance: Children You Know Might Be Missing Out, An Outreach Kit (with posters in English & Spanish)
1994. Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The Future of Children: Critical Health Issues for Children and Youth
Vol. 4, No. 3. 1994. Los Altos, Calif.: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

So You Want to Start a Community Health Center: A Practical Guide for Starting a Community Health Center
1996. Washington D.C.: National Association of Community Health Centers, Inc.

Organizations

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
847/228-5005
Fax: 847/434-8000
www.aap.org

Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities
c/o Health Research and Education Trust
1 N. Franklin
Chicago, IL 60606
312/422-2635
Fax: 312/422-4568
www.healthycommunities.org

Families USA Foundation
1334 G Street, NW, Third Floor
Washington, DC 20005-3169
202/628-3030
Fax: 202/347-2417
www.familiesusa.org

National Association of County & City Health Officials
1100 17th Street, NW
Second Floor
Washington, DC 20036
202/783-5550
Fax: 202/783-1583
www.naccho.org

Child and family health collaborations in your area can be located by visiting www.rwjf.org or contacting:
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Route 1 and College Road East
P.O. Box 2316
Princeton, NJ 08543-2316
609/452-8701

Universal Health Care Action Network
2800 Euclid Ave., Suite 520
Cleveland, OH 44115-2418
216/241-8422
800/634-4442
Fax: 216/241-8423
www.uhcan.org

On-Line Resources

Bureau of Primary Health Care
(Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
www.bphc.hrsa.dhhs.gov

Health Care Financing Administration / Children's Health Insurance Program
www.hcfa.gov/init/children.htm

Health Resources and Services Administration
(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
www.hrsa.dhhs.gov/childhealth

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Visit the Web site to find the WIC-administering agency in your state:
www.fns.usda.gov/wic

Community Economic Development

Publications & Videotapes

At Your Fingertips: An Annotated Bibliography for Community Economic Development Practitioners
By Carol Wayman. 1997. Washington, D.C.

Directory of U.S. Microenterprise Programs
Association for Enterprise Opportunity. 1999. Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute.

FRCA Report: Family Support and Community Economic Development
Vol. 16, No. 3. 1997. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

From Community-Based to Community-Staffed: The Experience of Three Allegheny County Family Centers in Community Hiring
By C. Bruner. 1998. Pittsburgh, Penn.: Office of Child Development, University of Pittsburgh.

Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street
1997. Videotape. Hohokus, N.J.: New Day Films.

Linking Human Services and Economic Development
1997. Washington, D.C.: Center for Community Change.

Organizations

Institute for Social and Economic Development
1901 Broadway, Ste. 313
Iowa City, IA 52240
319/338-2331
www.ised.org

Local Initiatives Support Corporation
1055 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 1600
Los Angeles, CA 90017
213/250-9550
Fax: 213/250-9889
www.liscnet.org

National Congress for Community Economic Development
1030 15th St., NW, Ste. 325
Washington, DC 20005
202/289-9020 or 877/44N-CCED
Fax: 202/289-7051
www.ncced.org

National Housing Law Project
614 Grand Ave., Ste. 320
Oakland, CA 94610
510/251-9400
Fax: 510/451-2300
www.nhlp.org

Time Dollar Institute
P.O. Box 42519
Washington, DC 20015
202/686-5200
Fax: 202/537-5033
www.timedollar.org

On-Line Resources

The Enterprise Foundation
www.enterprisefoundation.org

National Community Building Network
www.ncbn.org

Welfare Information Network
www.welfareinfo.org

References

Benedict, L., and Chung, P. (1997) "Financial institutions that empower." *FRCA Report* 17 (3)

Else, J. (1997) "Job skills aren't enough: Success leaving welfare means work skills and family support." *FRCA Report* 17 (3)

Family Support America. (2000) *Family support and Time Dollars: How to build community using social capital.* (Chicago, Ill.)

Hochman, L. (1997) "Community partnership lending through credit unions." *FRCA Report* 17 (3)

Horn, T. (1999) "Teachers get parents involved." *America's Family Support Magazine* 18 (3)

James, D. Walker, ed. (1999) *Some things do make a difference for youth: A compendium of evaluations of youth programs and practices.* (Washington, D.C.: American Youth Policy Forum)

Koralek, D. (1992) *Caregivers of young children: Preventing and responding to child maltreatment.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families & Administration on Children, Youth and Families and National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect)

National Research Council (1998) *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press)

Sia, C., Osterhus, L., and Pandak, C. (1998) "Pediatricians as family support partners." *FRCA Report* 17 (2-3)

Chapter 5

Delivering Programs Effectively

Delivering Programs Effectively

This chapter explores various service strategies that are used by family support centers. Most centers use a variety of strategies for working with families in order to respond to individual families' needs and levels of comfort in groups and in one-on-one settings. Some begin with one-on-one strategies and then gradually introduce families to the group situation. Decisions about service strategies affect how families are approached, how staff are trained, and the type of programming offered.

This chapter examines group-based strategies such as support groups and classes, one-on-one interventions such as home visiting and family development work, and informal service strategies such as mentoring and family recreational programming.

Group Work

Support Groups

A support group offers an opportunity for people with common life situations or a common set of challenges to meet and help each other by sharing experiences, ideas, frustrations, successes, and hopes. Support groups offer benefits such as emotional support, information and education, the opportunity to help others, socialization, and advocacy and empowerment.

As a support group grows and develops, it can help participants

- learn from each other about common struggles and successes
- gain reliable information
- develop skills that can more effectively support them

Establishing a Support Group: Before You Begin

Support groups are often one of the basic components of a family support center. Prior to offering a support group, it is important that staff members understand the critical distinction between the purpose and benefits of a support group and those of professional counselors, therapy groups, and formal educational classes. Parent-led support groups are clearly not intended to substitute for intensive or individual/family professional therapy. Participants whose needs exceed the scope and capacity of a support group should respectfully be encouraged to seek assistance from the professional community.

Support groups usually exist along a continuum, ranging from staff-led to parent-led models. The differences between support group types may be subtle; groups are differentiated mostly by group leadership. In therapy groups, the leader/facilitator is a professionally trained psychotherapist. He or she uses psychotherapy techniques and peer interactions in a group setting to achieve interpersonal change and achieve group goals. In staff-led support groups, the leader/facilitator plays a less direct role. He or she aids communication and ensures that group rules are followed, but does not direct the group. Change occurs through peer interactions that are supported by the professional. In parent-led groups, there is no professional or staff person directing or facilitating the group. All change occurs by means of peer-to-peer interactions.

Support Groups: Tips from the Field

"To recruit people to take on volunteer leadership roles in the group, I first generate a conversation based on similar interest such as motherhood. Next, I explore her interests by asking her to name: (a) something she likes to do, (b) something she thinks she's good at, and (c) something she thinks she might like to do."

"When looking for a suitable meeting place, include a place with childcare available."

"When beginning a group, take your time and get to know each other—share your motivations, needs, hopes, and dreams. Include everyone in the decision-making process."

"It takes time to get it right. Be flexible and always get input from group members."

Sometimes a therapy group or professionally facilitated group can evolve into a self-help group. This primarily occurs when group participants decide they can benefit from further interactions and support from one another after the designated end of the professionally led or facilitated group. In these instances, participants will need to adjust to the change in the group dynamic and may struggle at first with the lack of a clearly defined leader.

Guidelines for Operating Support Groups

Although there are many different approaches and strategies, following are some well-established guidelines for operating support groups:

- **Identify the purpose and goals of the support group.** It is important to provide potential participants with a clear statement of the group's purpose and intended goals. Based on this information, potential participants can decide whether the group is likely to address their needs and concerns.

- **Recruit participants.** If the purpose and goals of the group are clearly outlined, it is likely that participants with common concerns and issues will be attracted to joining. When recruiting participants, it is wise to stress the importance of bringing good listening skills to the group. The most important element of an effective group is the quality of listening that is fostered among its participants. Since listening is at the core of the group, good listening practices must be established in the group from the start. Each member should be able to offer respect and attention to others. People who interrupt, offer advice, or analysis must be kindly and firmly steered back toward focused listening.

  Bigger is not always better. The degree of respect offered is far more important to the parents than the size of the group. Three or four people getting together regularly to provide support can become a very effective support group. To recruit initial members, reach out beyond the center to places where people already gather—nursery schools, day care centers, and play groups. And remember that you are looking to develop a small core group of skilled listeners to serve as a base from which to begin.

- **Identify leadership.** The importance of developing leadership within the group cannot be overstated. As groups move from the staff-led to the parent-led models, leadership shifts away from staff toward the group members. Initially, most groups draw upon a staff person to function as the leader/facilitator of the group. This person serves as a role model to set the tone, guide the discussion, and influence how participants interact. It is the leader who must model good listening, with approval and respect for all participants.

  Sometimes the group leader must provide simple information — but not advice. It is appropriate for the leader to share basic information, but a good rule of thumb is that if a leader has said more than three sentences at one time, he or she is probably talking too much or heading down the path of giving advice.

  Leaders should consider getting training in specific areas in order to be as effective as possible. Leaders want to create a trusting learning environment for the participants in the group, and knowledge of and skills in group facilitation, cultural competency, family systems, child development, and parent education are all helpful.

Self-Assessment for Group Leaders

- **Do I interrupt or pass judgement on anyone?**
- **Am I listening attentively?**
- **Am I honest about my own feelings and uncertainties?**
- **Am I reacting negatively to anyone in the group? If so, why?**
- **Do I value and respect each person here? How do I convey that?**
- **Do I fill silent moments with talk?**

- **Coordinate logistics.** Another person might be chosen to serve as the group's contact person. He or she is responsible for the logistical aspects of the group meeting. Some of the activities that the contact person might undertake are contacting potential members to make them comfortable about coming to meetings, providing meeting information for interested parents, answering general questions about the group, and making reminder phone calls to members about meetings. Because of the importance of these tasks, this position should not rotate as frequently as other leadership positions within the group.

- **Set parameters.** The group must decide a number of logistical and policy questions. Issues to be decided include whether the meetings will be open or closed, the frequency and duration of the meetings, where the group will meet, whether childcare will be provided (and if so, how), and finally, how the shift from staff-led to parent-led meetings will occur.

  Deciding how often the group will meet is an important decision. Once-a-week meetings have many advantages in that parents get to know each other relatively quickly and the intimacy is not lost between meetings. The members get to share their stories and provide weekly updates, and this brings the group closer together. Meeting every other week also allows parents to develop close relationships and familiarity, but at this pace a sense of continuity is harder to maintain. If this is the schedule that is chosen, it is recommended that the group begin by meeting weekly for the first four to six weeks in order to develop the rapport and kinship that is desired. Monthly meetings can work, but they are usually less effective, especially if the group members do not know each other.

Again, if monthly meetings are the choice, it is best to meet for four to six consecutive weeks to give the participants a chance to develop a solid relationship before adopting a monthly schedule.

The First Meeting

Here are some other tips for making the first meeting productive and successful.

1. Before the first meeting, be sure the organizers have discussed and reached a consensus on what the general purpose, goals, and membership of the group should be. Present those ideas clearly at the first meeting, ask the group for feedback, and aim to reach a consensus. Some common goals and purposes for support groups include

   - giving participants time to think, plan, and problem-solve
   - helping participants understand that their struggles are not theirs alone
   - helping participants build supportive relationships
   - giving participants a safe place to work through tensions
   - offering participants a broader understanding of diversity and circumstances

2. It is a good idea to have a few people (both staff members and participants) at the meeting who are responsible for welcoming and greeting new members. Ask all the participants to introduce themselves and to speak briefly about why they decided to attend.

3. Set out guidelines and a format for the group, and make sure ideas are discussed and agreed on by members. It is important that participants understand that the group offers them an opportunity to establish listening relationships that will differ from their other casual friendships. At the first meeting, put participants in "listening pairs" for three to five minutes and discuss with them the skills involved. Other general guidelines to share at the first meeting include the following:

   - Adopt an attitude of full respect for every member of the group.
   - Maintain focused listening, accompanied by full respect. This is of significant value to all members of the group.
   - Give full attention to the person who is speaking. Do not interrupt.
   - Refrain from giving advice. Instead, offer an environment that encourages and fosters problem solving and experimentation.
   - Openly praise the efforts and successes of everyone in the group.
   - Keep the conversations of the group members confidential.

Guidelines for Group Members

It is important to structure meetings so that each person has an opportunity to give a brief account of what is going well in his or her life. A family support framework encourages people to focus on their strengths and abilities rather than approach situations from a deficit orientation. It asks participants to shift their focus from their unsolved problems to their victories, which are too often ignored. Setting a tone of success and competency will help participants move away from their worries for a time and come to appreciate their strengths and abilities.

Group attention to each participant is the core of the support group. The point of allowing each person to talk is to give him or her something that is not so readily available in everyday life: the opportunity to think out loud and have the undivided attention of others. When the group pays attention to one person at a time, without interrupting, it becomes a safe place to talk about personal and parenting challenges and to problem-solve. During the group time, each person should be afforded equal time.

Providing time for one-on-one listening pairs at each meeting allows participants to explore pressing issues in greater depth. It also provides a time for relationship building. These sessions should allow at least five minutes for each of the partners to speak.

At the close of each group session, ask each person to specifically appreciate someone in the group. Its important that no one go home without having been appreciated, so each person might be asked to appreciate his or her listening partner. This is a way to acknowledge the bravery that it takes for participants to share their concerns. It is also a way to give parents, who simply do not get enough acknowledgment for the dedicated and difficult job they do, some appreciation and thanks.

Group Maintenance and Evaluation

A key factor for group effectiveness is being sensitive to group problems and attending to them in a prompt manner. In all groups, difficult situations and negative behaviors will arise. Leaders should try their best to prepare for difficult situations. These may include conflict; displays of anger, grief, and tears; personal revelations that go beyond the norms of the group; and inappropriate actions.

A leader's response to difficult situations should always be honest, nonjudgmental, and sensitive. How a leader responds depends on his or her personal style and interpretation of the situation. Some strategies for dealing with difficult moments or negative behavior include (Braun, Coplon, and Sonnenschein 1984)

- universalizing the situation by moving the focus from the individual to the group and finding ways that everyone can relate to it
- neutralizing the situation by removing some of its emotional impact
- providing information
- asking for more information
- postponing discussion (but returning to it eventually)
- talking privately with the parent(s)
- providing concrete help
- giving a direct response
- sharing feelings or concerns, without arousing fear or judging the speaker
- setting a limit
- involving the group in deciding what to do
- responding nonverbally

Difficulties and lulls are typical and to be expected. But feelings of not being alone, the personal satisfaction of helping others, and the realization of one's potential usually outweigh these among participants, as do the joy, laughter, friendship, compassion, genuine concern, and mutual support that the group provides.

Classes

Classes are one of the key ways in which family support centers provide information to participants. Some centers offer a range of topical classes that participants can access as needed, ranging from parenting issues to life skills. Other centers offer a more formal structure whereby participants are expected to participate in and complete an entire curriculum. Below are some guidelines for establishing classes at your family support center.

Guidelines for Offering Classes

- **Poll program participants**. The classes offered should be based on the needs and interests of program participants. Developing a simple survey to solicit information on the issues participants are grappling with is a good method for identifying subject areas for class offerings. Some of the more common offerings at a family support center include classes on parenting, GED, ESL, and job readiness.

- **Establish a participant advisory group.** Participants should have a major role in determining which subjects are covered and how classes are structured. Establishing a parent advisory group is helpful for handling issues such as where and when classes should meet, the extensiveness of the curriculum, and which speakers (if any) should be invited and for discussing the expectations of those participating in the classes. By providing opportunities for participants to help in the planning process, the center offers an opportunity for participants to gain experience and skills in program planning, communicating, and goal setting.

- **Network with other organizations**. Other community organizations can be an important resource for locating speakers, materials, and ideas for classes. Organizations to contact include community colleges, churches, the local library, health centers, WIC administrators, and local job training programs. It is useful to sit in on classes and lectures offered in other locations to see the strategies that are used and the overall structure of the workshop series; it is also useful for finding possible topics and facilitators for future class offerings.

- **Establish an appropriate structure**. Classes can either be offered in a modular program, where families can attend the individual classes which interest them, or in an ongoing course where participants are required to attend all or most of a series of classes. The modular format may draw larger audiences as participants are not required to make a long-term commitment and can choose exactly what interests them. However, the longer-term format allows for more depth, for building classes off of each other, and for establishing relationships both between instructors and participants and within the group.

- **Establish appropriate logistics.** Addressing logistics involves determining where and when the classes will be held, who the intended audience is, who will teach or facilitate the class, and what financial resources will be needed. Classes can be held at the center, at the home of a participant, or at another community institution, such as a school or a library. The following questions can help guide in choosing a location: Is the location easily accessible to participants? Will all participants feel comfortable in the setting? Will the needed supplies be accessible (e.g., whiteboards, markers, easel paper, etc.)? Will it be possible to bring food and dishes? Is space for childcare available? Will the meeting place be available at a time convenient for participants?

In determining when classes should meet, program participants should decide what time is most convenient for them. The center should be prepared to offer classes at night or on weekends if most participants work nine to five. Also, offering classes multiple times can help ensure that a more people are reached. As with other center programming, arrange to have childcare available for class participants. If classes are held in the evenings, it may be necessary to engage evening childcare staff.

- **Create an interactive and supportive atmosphere.** Participants should feel that the classes provide an opportunity to share information, learn from each other, and learn from the speaker or facilitator. In addition, participants should have an opportunity to put their own questions and concerns on the table. Centers should experiment with various teaching and learning styles, and observe what the parents respond to the most. See the end of this chapter for a handout on tips for adult learning styles.

  As in every other element of a family support center, the class atmosphere should be as far from "institutional" or "agency" as possible. Think about room size, furniture, lighting, colors, and floors, and create a space that is welcoming, informal, homey, and comfortable.

- **Bring in outside speakers.** Having outside speakers present a workshop or a series of classes brings new energy, new perspectives, and creativity to the program. Be thoughtful and discriminating, however, about who is invited to teach. Take the time to meet with speakers before they present, and give them an orientation to the center and its family support work. Always make sure that there is a staff observer at classes utilizing outside speakers. This will ensure that someone is there to solve any logistical problems that arise and to evaluate the overall presentation.

- **Provide free useful items.** Whenever possible, gifts should be arranged that relate to the subject being discussed (i.e., calendars for time or stress management classes, recipe booklets or cooking ingredients for nutrition classes, or a calculator for money management classes). Gifts, as well as handouts and materials, encourage program participants to use the knowledge they have acquired outside of class.

Choosing a Curriculum

Using an Established Curriculum

Using an established curriculum provides an opportunity to use a tool that has been researched and field-tested and to build off the work of others rather than reinventing the wheel. Established curricula also help structure the classes by giving specific information and exercises to use with participants. The disadvantage of using an established curriculum is that it may not be appropriate to the particular needs of the families at the center and it may feel too rigid for both participants and staff.

There is no one curriculum that works for every center. The curriculum chosen should be right for the program, the community, and the families who will be participating. Here are some steps to take when evaluating existing curricula:

- Compare the learning goals set forth in the curriculum to the mission and goals of the center and determine if there is a suitable match.

- Ask program participants to help choose the curriculum. Parents may be the best reviewers of curricula available—they'll be able to indicate if a particular curriculum meets their needs or speaks to them, or not.

- Ensure that the curriculum address the culture, norms, and family practices of the community.

Tips for working with an established curriculum:

- **Test it.** Often, reading a curriculum is not enough to know if it will work. Test out a class—are the instructions clear enough? Is the facilitation and teaching style comfortable? How do the participants rate it?

- **Consider training.** Many producers of established curricula also offer training either as part of the cost of purchasing the curriculum or for an additional fee. It may be a worthwhile investment. Taking part in established training can help one become more practiced in working with the curriculum, foresee pitfalls and trouble spots, and enhance teaching abilities.

- **Review facilitation skills.** The content of a curriculum is only part of what makes it successful. The person teaching the classes should make sure that he or she is comfortable answering questions, resolving conflict, dealing with the unexpected, and generally facilitating groups.

- **Don't be afraid to adapt.** No curriculum will be exactly right for any one program and community. If a particular class or segment doesn't work for participating families, change it. The best curricula are flexible and can be adapted to the culture of the targeted community.

Developing Your Own Curriculum

Developing your own curriculum provides flexibility and the ability to tailor classes to meet the needs of participants. Meeting the interests and needs of participants may require polling families on the classes they want to see offered and bringing in resources from the community or developing classes on an as-needed basis. This approach is harder than using an established curriculum in that the center must build a base of knowledge about the subject areas identified, coordinate with partners in the community who can bring their expertise to the center, and develop in-house training activities and exercises to help impart the information.

Tips for developing your own curriculum:

- **Start by talking to the parents who participate in the center.** The advantage of creating customized classes is that they can be tailored to whatever the participating families want and need. Start with a focus group or short survey. What are the issues in their lives that training or information could address? Include questions about their learning styles and goals for themselves and their children.

- **Do research.** Before offering a class, review a few existing curricula that deal with the subject area. Look at how they are structured and the topics they cover. Learn from others how to structure exercises and activities.

- **Collaborate.** In most communities there are many, many resources that can help with any classes that the center might want to offer. Local clinics and hospitals often have community health educators or other staff who can teach about nutrition or other family health issues. The local school nurse could teach about childhood illnesses and immunization. Many community colleges or local universities have faculty members with expertise on adult learning and development who could help with GED classes or an ESL course. Local businesses might be able to help with computer training or other job-readiness skills.

- **Be creative.** Many adults do not learn well from lectures or other nonparticipatory formats. Make classes fun and interactive, vary the format in which information is imparted, and remember that there is a lot of expertise already in the room that can be built upon.
- **Maintain quality control.** Particularly when working without an established curriculum, it is important to ensure that the information being presented is really meeting participants' needs. Class instructors should receive regular supervision and support to help them address issues that might arise in the class. Supervisors should sit in on classes in order to provide targeted feedback. Finally, student satisfaction and pre-and-post tests should be used to monitor whether the classes are meeting needs and whether the participants are learning new skills and strategies.

Choosing a Parent Education Curriculum

Evaluation Criteria	What to Look for in a Curriculum
1. The curriculum is consistent with existing human development theory and practice.	• Appropriate parenting skills are demonstrated. • Material is appropriate to child's developmental level. • Documentation of research exists for materials.
2. Materials do not sanction psychological or physical abuse.	• Opportunities exist for child-to-parent communication. • Alternatives to corporal punishment are emphasized. • Appropriate parental expectations of children are emphasized.
3. The curriculum encompasses diversity in family structure and function.	• A variety of family structures are depicted. • Materials are presented with sensitivity to all family structures. • Parenting styles are identified and discussed. • Opportunity exists for parents to explore the strengths of their family structure.
4. The curriculum is appropriate for the intended audience.	• Material presented is meaningful to the intended audience. • Persons of color are portrayed in a variety of roles (leaders, narrator, facilitator, participants, observers, etc.) appropriate to the intended audience. • Culturally relevant themes are presented (i.e., heritage, religion, economics, etc.). • Culturally relevant family issues are realistically presented (e.g., discipline, consequences, sibling relationships).
5. There is a range of socioeconomic statuses portrayed.	• Appropriate family activities are portrayed. • Curriculum support materials are available, priced relative to the audience's ability to pay. • Information is presented without condescending attitudes. • Stereotypes are not used.
6. Technical aspects contribute to a usable curriculum.	• Technical aspects are user-friendly. • Video/audio are adequate quality. • Reading level is appropriate for intended audience. • Language is appropriate for intended audience.

Adapted from Wingo, et al., 1994

One-on-One Work

Home Visiting

While home visiting programs can have a variety of goals and purposes, within a family support center, they are generally used for three purposes:

- to convey information about parenting and demonstrate positive parenting practice
- to reach isolated families and connect them to informal and formal resources in the community
- to build a relationship and provide support for families during critical early childhood years

While these purposes are not mutually exclusive, each has implications for the target population, program structure, staff training, curricula, and strategies used. Since home visiting represents a service delivery method, decisions about a particular program should be driven by the characteristics and needs of the population being served. (Powell 1993, 36). Historically, home visiting programs have focused on a variety of goals, including

- promotion of parenting skills
- promotion of children's health (including the prevention of poor birth outcomes such as preterm births and low birth weights)
- prevention of child abuse and neglect
- promotion of children's cognitive development
- enhancement of parental caregiving and well-being (including educational and employment status)

Programs may have diverse goals, but they share an emphasis on the importance of children's early years and on the pivotal role that parents play in shaping a child's life. One of the best ways to reach families with young children is by bringing services to them rather than expecting them to seek assistance. Home visitors can see the environments in which families live, gain a better understanding of family needs, and tailor services individually. The relationships forged between home visitors and parents can break through loneliness and isolation and serve as the first step in linking families to the services available at the family support center and in their communities. Some researchers believe that the trusting relationship developed between a parent and a home visitor can be a first step in developing the parents' ability to form and sustain secure relationships with others, including their own children. (Heinecke and Ponce 1999)

Beyond differences in specific goals, home visiting programs may also differ in the level of services offered, in their staffing, and in whom they serve. Programs also differ in the onset, duration, and intensity of services, as well as offering variations in the experience and training requirements of home visitors. Home visiting services usually include all or some of the following:

1. **Parent education**
   - child development information
   - parenting skills activities
   - parental coping skills activities

2. **Direct assistance to parents**
   - respite care
   - transportation
   - homemaking service
   - educational services
   - job preparation

3. **Service coordination/management**
   - information delivery and service linkages
   - coordination of community support
   - coordination of medical services
   - case management
   - family and child advocacy

4. **Psychological support/counseling**
   - emotional support
   - stress management

5. **Physical care**
   - health care and health promotion
   - nutrition service
   - child development/diagnostic screening
   - family planning

Tips for Conducting Home Visits

- Become acquainted and establish rapport with family members.
- Review the purpose of the home visiting program with the family.
- Explain your role.
- Enlist participants as partners and clarify expectations.
- Show empathy, respect, and genuine interest in the family's wishes and challenges.
- Don't interview participants; talk with them.
- Ask only those questions that are relevant to the purpose of the visit.
- Establish mutually acceptable goals.
- Manage boundaries.
- Schedule the next visit and outline the focus.

Recommendations from National Home Visiting Evaluation Studies

The spring/summer 1999 edition of the Packard Foundation's journal, *The Future of Children*, offers suggestions for program implementation based on evaluations of six national home visiting programs conducted over the course of the last six years.

In brief, the Packard Foundation identifies family engagement, curriculum delivery, and the skills and abilities of home visitors as key aspects of programs that must be improved. Their report suggests that even if those improvements are made, expectations of home visiting programs need to be more modest and cautions that home visiting should not be relied upon as the sole service strategy for families with young children—rather it should be thought of as one part of a broad set of necessary services.

- **Family Engagement:** Evaluations have shown that once families were enrolled in programs, for a variety of reasons, they received on average about half the scheduled number of visits. Providing too few visits can have a number of consequences that include (1) hampering the formation of a solid relationship between the family and the home visitor, which reduces the likelihood that change can occur, and (2) offering incomplete delivery of the program's curriculum.

  High attrition rates also affect family engagement. Results of the six national programs show that between 20 and 67 percent of enrolled families leave before the program is over. The reasons for attrition vary and include moving from the community, lack of interest in the program, inadequate outreach to hard-to-engage families, and program design issues. Program planners and managers must also recognize that attrition can be a reflection of our majority societal belief that a nonfamily member is not welcome in the personal family "business" of childrearing.

- **Curriculum Delivery:** Another program quality recommendation calls for enhanced and more consistent curriculum delivery. The national evaluation studies indicate that curricula are often not delivered with fidelity to all families. It should be noted that as home visitors individualize services to meet family needs, some deviations from the model may occur (Berlin, O'Neal, and Brooks-Gunn 1998). However, program managers should ensure that such innovations do not compromise program quality.

- **Staffing Issues:** Staffing is a critical factor in the design and implementation of a home visiting program. Home visitors need a broad range of skills and a comprehensive body of knowledge in order to work effectively with families in their homes. Home visitors must have personal skills to establish rapport with families, problem-solving skills to address issues as they arise, and the maturity to understand and negotiate issues of privacy, confidentiality, and power sharing. See chapter 8 for more on the skills and training needed by family support center staff.

  Probably the most intense debate in the home visiting field concerns whether it is better to use professional or paraprofessional staff. This debate has important implications for operating costs, training, and supervision. Currently, most researchers believe that it is not possible to conclude that individuals from a particular professional or educational discipline make better home visitors (Wasik 1993; Cowan, Powell, and Cowan 1996). However, it does seem likely that extremely well-trained visitors are needed to serve families that face multiple and complex issues. One program model calls for the use of paraprofessionals to conduct universal outreach efforts and then the use of professional home visitors for follow-up with families that have intensive needs.

  The question of whether to employ professionals or paraprofessionals is further complicated by the fact that different program goals and objectives might require different skills or training. To reach some program objectives, it might be necessary to employ a home visitor with a nursing or health-related background. Another objective might call for a professional trained in early childhood education or social services. Therefore, it is not always a question of choosing a professional or not, but rather of employing someone with *specific knowledge or skills.* Simple or generalized answers to staffing questions are not easy to arrive at because center goals and family needs vary widely.

- **Supervision and Support:** Regardless of skill level, close supervision and a structured support system is needed to help home visitors deal with the emotional stresses of the job, prevent drift from program protocols, combat isolation, and provide an opportunity for reflection and personal growth. Home visitors need to meet regularly with supervisory staff and their peers. Case notes, outcomes, and goal achievement need to be reviewed regularly. Additionally, a supervisor should be on call at all times to provide coaching and support when a home visitor is dealing with a crisis situation or is having a difficult time with a family. Home visitors must also be equipped with the resources that will enable them to communicate effectively with supervisors in an emergency situation—beepers, phone cards, portable phones, and so on. Someone should be available to shadow or accompany home visitors on visits where they feel uncomfortable. The home visitor-to-supervisor ratio should be kept low to facilitate an effective and supportive relationship between the supervisor and the home visiting staff.

  High staff turnover among home visitors can be a serious problem. Since the one-on-one relationship has been noted as one of the keys to program effectiveness (Larner, Halpern, and Harkavy 1992), high staff turnover can be a barrier to achieving intended results with families. The consistency with which turnover is reported as a problem suggests that centers should pay attention to this issue. Higher wages, more intensive training, and hiring those with higher educational levels might be ways to reduce turnover and increase the quality of services.

- **Connecting to Other Services for Families:** Home visiting programs seek to alter the behavior of individuals as a way of addressing large societal problems such as child abuse and neglect, lack of school readiness, and teen pregnancy. The current thinking of those in the field is that there is a need to moderate expectations of the impact of home visiting programs that encourage behavioral change by providing 20 to 40 hours of social support, parent education, and case management over the course of a few years.

  Recent research indicates that the reality is that home visiting is a fragile intervention. It depends on other community agencies for any success in case management and on parents for any improved outcomes for children. Home visiting programs stress individual behavioral responsibility, but personal change is difficult when the problems are societal or communitywide. If families live in communities where poverty is entrenched and assets are few, then programs that focus merely on individual change may be striving against the odds.

  The Packard Foundation analysis of the national evaluations of home visiting programs suggests that more modest and realistic expectations be developed. Because home visiting programs will not and cannot serve the needs of all families, they should be thought of as a complement to other service strategies. These may include more child-focused strategies (high-quality day care), parent-focused services that are delivered in other ways (parenting classes offered in the community or on the job site), or other policy and program options that could increase the connections between parent and child.

Family Development Services

Family development services represent an intensive, one-on-one effort to work with a family over an extended period of time to promote the learning, growth, and development of individual family members. Family development services are usually offered to families under extreme stress or to those individuals needing special assistance. The purposes of family development services are to (Dean 1996, 51)

- help families restore their sense of self-respect, self-reliance, and hope
- help families reclaim their dreams of a better life
- help families assess their own strengths and needs, reflect critically on how they arrived where they are, and determine what will help them move toward self-reliance
- help families develop long- and short-term goals
- help families gain access to the services they need to reach these goals
- encourage families to develop their own strengths as they move toward their goals, including developing and practicing needed skills
- encourage communities to support families

The Family Development Process

1. **The family develops a partnership with a family development worker.**
2. **A family development worker helps the family assess its needs and strengths. This is an ongoing process.**
3. **The family sets its own goals based on its members' desires and identifies ideas for reaching these goals.**
4. **The family development worker helps the family make a written plan for pursuing these goals, with some tasks being the responsibility of the family members and some the worker's. Accomplishments are celebrated, and the plan is continually updated.**
5. **The family learns and practices skills needed to become self-reliant. This is an ongoing process.**
6. **The family uses services as steppingstones to reach its goals.**
7. **The family's sense of responsibility and self-control is restored. The family is strengthened through the family development process, and becomes better able to handle future challenges.**

(Dean 1996)

The intent of family development services is to help family members gain the skills and capacity to meet their personal and family goals. By working one-on-one with family members to clearly articulate the goals they wish to achieve and by identifying the mechanisms that are necessary to achieve them, a family support center helps a family produce a roadmap to healthy family functioning and economic self-sufficiency. Lastly, a family support center can help families establish the ties to community resources that they will need to maintain their future growth and development.

Family development workers often use individualized family support plans (IFSPs) to facilitate the process of identifying family needs, articulating family goals, and mobilizing the resources and supports needed to meet those goals. The IFSP is a tool for documenting what happens with the family and for ascertaining whether or not efforts to mobilize resources and supports were successful. The process of developing a flexible and responsive IFSP is substantially more important than the product itself. (Dunst, Trivette, and Deal 1994, 61)

The process of developing IFSPs is guided by a number of principles that enable, empower, support, and strengthen family functioning (Dunst, et. al., 66–67):

- The IFSP is developed in the context of collaboration and partnerships between the family and the family development worker.
- Any and all information that is included in the IFSP is done so with the explicit permission and authorization of the family.
- The development and revision of the IFSP responds to the broad-based needs of families, although no worker or center can meet all family needs.
- Both the development and the implementation of the IFSP emphasizes promotion of the competence of the family and its interdependence with members of the community.

Framework for Developing an Individualized Family Support Plan

Background Information:

Identifying Information:
Child/family name
Family development worker

Child Behavior and Development:
Strengths and capabilities
Current levels of functioning

Family Functioning Style:
Strengths and capabilities
Intrafamily Resources

Community Support Services:
Informal
Formal

Intervention Plan:

Needs:
Child/siblings
Parent
Family members
Other

Sources of Support/Resources:
Intrafamily
Informal
Community
Formal

Course of Action:
Family

Evaluation:
Goal attainment
Satisfaction

Informal Services and Strategies

One of the key practices of family support is helping families identify, acknowledge, and utilize informal networks of support. Informal support, such as friends, relatives, neighbors, coworkers, or parent support groups, are vital to any family's ability to function well. When families feel connected to and supported by other people, they experience less isolation and loneliness and generally feel stronger and more confident in meeting the demands and responsibilities placed on them. Providing opportunities for parents and family members to develop support systems among themselves is an important strategy for fulfilling the family support mission of the center. Informal strategies offer a way for parents to connect with each other and strengthen their ability to deal confidently with parenting stresses and issues. Some informal strategies and services are discussed below.

Mentoring

Mentoring involves the presence of caring individuals who provide one-on-one support, advice, friendship, reinforcement, and constructive role modeling. Within a family support center, mentoring relationships can be conducted on an individual basis (adult-to-youth, youth-to-youth, etc.) or on a family-to-family basis. Mentoring relationships assist families in accessing needed services, in family problem solving, and in developing effective parenting skills. Mentoring also helps develop a network of informed advocates that can speak out on a variety of child- and family-related issues.

The National Mentoring Partnership and the United Way of America have developed a list of elements of effective mentoring practices, which is available on-line at www.mentoring.org. These elements represent program characteristics and policies that have proven effective in a wide range of mentoring settings.

Family support centers can contribute to mentoring in a variety of ways:

- They can distribute information and advocate for mentoring by distributing information, sharing research results on the benefits of mentoring, and promoting the expansion of mentoring resources in the community.
- They can recruit mentors from among their participating families or train and consult with other mentoring providers (communities of faith, schools, businesses, and civic organizations) to develop new programs or to strengthen those already in place.
- They can develop and administer adult-to-youth, youth-to-youth, or family-to-family mentoring programs on-site.

Parents often say that their first choice for support and guidance is another family in similar circumstances. Providing parents with access to others who have shared common experiences in raising their children, who face the same day-to-day challenges, and who can offer emotional support is an important service for a family support center to consider.

Parent-to-parent models have a history among families with children of special needs. Family mentoring programs, first implemented in the 1970s, have helped over 50,000 family members cope with the disability or chronic illness of a child. Parents receiving family-to-family support and assurance are helped with their feelings of loss and grief and are offered coping strategies and assistance with managing stress. Volunteer parents help others face the many challenges of navigating a maze of social and medical services; learning a new language of medical, legal, financial, and special education acronyms; and dealing with physical pain and day-to-day obstacles. There are now over 600 local parent-to-parent programs in the United States.

Findings from a 1996 national study indicated that more than 80 percent of parents receiving parent-to-parent support find it helpful, and interviews with parents demonstrate that this unique approach can play a central role in any comprehensive family support system.

How Our Center Does It

Family Connection

South Carolina

Family Connection is a grassroots, parent-driven organization whose mission is to provide parent-to-parent support that strengthens families and to increase awareness about persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Key among its efforts is the Family Partner program. Family Partners, employees of Family Connection, are supported through a contract with the state of South Carolina. The Family Partners provide frequent support to families who have young children, meeting with them at medical or therapy appointments and providing in-home visits, as well. They help parents adjust to their unexpected role as parents of children with special needs, providing tips on communication with professionals and suggesting ways to reduce stress.

Recreational Programming

Recreation is an often-overlooked yet valuable service strategy for working with overburdened families. Family recreational programming can enhance intergenerational ties and increase trust and communication between family members. Recreation is a vehicle that allows families to play together, laugh together, and explore the expression of personal values within the family context.

Family recreation can

- increase family communication
- increase family cohesiveness
- facilitate laughter and positive touch
- model life and coping skills
- offer an opportunity for children to be the experts/leaders
- provide children with a chance to see parents in a different role
- generate good family memories
- enable families to work toward a goal that is not emotionally charged
- give families a focus
- eliminate the opportunity for boredom to breed chaos
- enhance creativity for parents and kids
- allow families to move out of their comfort zone and explore new activities
- have a positive effect on the psycho-social development of young children and adolescents
- be a positive predictor of marital stability and satisfaction

Family Recreation Tips

The Parent Education Network in Chino, California, offers these suggestions:

- Consider innovative time schedules that will meet the needs of your population.
- Offer enough low-cost and/or sliding-scale programs so that families are not denied access.
- Facilitate networks for transportation.
- Provide opportunities for single parents to have adult social interaction.
- Offer a wide range of individual and/or family exercise, relaxation, or stress reduction classes.
- Consider a variety of formats (classes, clinics, fairs, etc.).
- Offer age-appropriate group activities, but don't stereotype or overlook the tremendous opportunities for cross-generational programming.

Exchanges

Family-to-family exchanges of clothing, toys, books, and other household items are another informal way for families in your center to help each other. Exchanges can be either ongoing or offered periodically. Items that are not exchanged between your center's participants could be donated to local shelters or charities.

A national resource for contributions of quality products and services that could be part of your center's exchange program is Gifts in Kind International, which secures product donations from the private sector and serves as a conduit for the donation of these products to the nonprofit sector. Grassroots organizations can register directly with Gifts in Kind for products they need or work through a Coordinating Agency Partner (CAP). Most CAPs are local branches of United Way, food banks, volunteer centers, or a community foundation. See the Resources list at the end of this chapter for contact information.

Resources

Group Work

Publications

Helping Parents in Groups: A Leaders Handbook
By L. A. Braun, J. K. Coplon, and P. C. Sonnenschein. 1984. Boston: Resource Communications, Inc.

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Parenting Education and Family Support Fact Sheet
1999. Chicago: Family Support America.

Organizations

Parents Anonymous
The National Organization
675 W. Foothill Blvd
Suite 220
Claremont, CA. 91711
Phone: 909/621-6184
Fax: 909/625-6304
www.parentsanonymous-natl.org

National Parent Network on Disabilities
1130 17th St. NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202/463-2299
Fax: 202/463-9403
www.npnd.org

One-on-One Work

Publications

A Guest in My Home: A Guide to Home Visiting Partnerships that Strengthen Families and Communities
By T. Hoover, F. Johnson, C. Wells, C. Graham, and M. Biddleman. 1996. Washington, D.C.: Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations
Future of Children. Vol. 9, no.1. Spring/Summer 1999. Palo Alto, Calif.: David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Home Visiting: Procedures for Helping Families
By B. H. Wasis, D. M. Bryant, and C. M. Lyons. 1990. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Home Visiting: Promoting Healthy Parent and Child Development
By C. Klass. 1996. Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

Organizations

Healthy Families America
Prevent Child Abuse America
200 S. Michigan Ave Suite 1700
Chicago, IL, 60604.
Phone: 312/663-3520.
Fax: 312/939-8962
www.prevent childabuse.org

The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood
8555 Hough Ave
Cleveland, OH 44106
Phone: 216/791-1468

Kemp Children's Center
1825 Marion St.
Denver, CO 80218
Phone: 303/864-5252
Fax: 303/864-5302

ZERO TO THREE
Early Head Start Training/TA Center
734 15th NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/638-1144
Fax: 202/638-0851
www.zerotothree.org

Informal Services and Strategies

Publications

How to Be a Great Mentor
Washington, D.C.: National Mentoring Partnership.

Mentoring: Elements of Effective Practice
Washington, D.C.: National Mentoring Partnership.

Mentoring for School-Age Children
Washington, D.C.: National Mentoring Partnership.

The Mentor Training Curriculum
Washington, D.C.: National Mentoring Partnership.

Parent to Parent: Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review
1996. Lawrence, Kans.: Beach Center on Families and Disability.

Organizations

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America
230 N. 13th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: 215/567-7000
Fax: 215/567-0394
www.bbbsa.org

ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology
621 Skytop Road, Suite 160
Syracuse, NY 13244
Phone: 800/464-9107
www.askeric.org

Gifts in Kind International
333 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA. 22314
Phone: 703/836-2121
Fax: 703/549-1481
www.giftsinkind.org

National Center on Parent-directed Family Resource Centers
3041 Olcott St.
Santa Clara, CA. 95054
Phone: 408/727-5775
Fax: 408/727-0182
www.php.com

National Mentoring Partnership
1400 I Street NW
Suite 850
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/729-4340
Fax: 202/729-4341
www.mentoring.org

Parent Education Network
2592 Notre Dame Blvd. Suite B
Chico, CA. 95928
Phone: 530/893-0591

Parent to Parent Program
Beach Center on Families and Disability
3111 Haworth Hall
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
Phone: 785/864-7600
Fax: 785/864-7605
www.lsi.ukans.edu/beach/beachhp.htm

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Chapter 6

Evaluating Your Center

Evaluating Your Center

Effective evaluation is not an event … but is an ongoing process which helps decision makers better understand the project; how it is impacting participants, partner agencies and the community; and how it is being influenced/impacted by both internal and external factors. Thinking of evaluation tools in this way allows you to collect and analyze important data for decision making throughout the life of a project: from assessing community needs prior to designing a project, to making connections between project activities and intended outcomes, to making mid-course changes in program design, to providing evidence to funders that yours is an effort worth funding.

—W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 1998

Program evaluation is one of the most critical activities that a family support center can undertake. It provides the foundation for strategic planning and program improvement and is often the means by which centers demonstrate the usefulness of their programs and maintain ongoing support and funding. Evaluation is also one of the most challenging processes that family support centers regularly undergo. For a variety of reasons, social programs, and family support programs in particular, are especially difficult to evaluate. Therefore, staff and participants should carefully plan their evaluation so that it meets their needs.

Evaluations can be conducted regarding the entire center or a select program or group of programs offered by the center. This chapter refers to "programs," but all information pertains to entire centers as well.

Important Considerations Before Evaluating

Who Wants to Know?

A variety of people may be interested in the evaluation of a program, all with unique perspectives and needs. When planning an evaluation, then, it is important to consider for whom the evaluation is being conducted and what they want to know. The following table lists some major audiences for program evaluations and what information they typically want to receive through the evaluation.

Audience	What They Want To Know
Policymakers	• social impact • how money is being spent • implications for policy • which constituencies are served
Funders	• social impact • how money is being spent • cost-effectiveness • program has diverse funding sources • program is effectively managed and developed • program impacts policy • services are nonduplicative and provided in collaboration with others

Taxpayers	• social impact • how money is being spent • program benefits them • what the program does
Community	• social impact • how money is being spent • program meets community needs • community is involved • program is responsive • program builds off and supports other community resources
Participants	• program makes a difference • time spent results in positive outcomes • participants meet their goals and show progress • program is respectful • program is responsive and accessible • program meets their needs
Other Service Providers	• program makes a difference • program forms positive relationships with participants • money is well spent • program builds off other community resources
Program Decisionmakers (i.e., board, management, and administrators)	• areas for improvement • relationship with participants • relationship with other service providers • impacts on participants • whether money is being well spent
Staff	• program makes a difference • people are appreciative • program is not being abused • money is spent wisely

What's In It For Your Center?

With all of these audiences in mind, it is important to keep your center's need for information that will help it do its job better central to the evaluation. One starting point for the evaluation is to reflect on *why* you are conducting an evaluation in the first place. How does the program benefit from the evaluation process? Frequently, programs conduct evaluations because they *have to*, because the funder requires an evaluation report or some other demonstration of effectiveness. While this accountability mechanism is a legitimate use of evaluation, programs need to free themselves from this narrow thinking and engage in evaluations that are useful for the day-to-day work of running an effective, quality program.

Evaluation has many potential uses for the program and the participating families. Because evaluation has multiple uses depending upon the evaluation team's perspective, it is important that all parties understand the various uses of evaluation and are clear on which purposes are most important in the program's specific situation. The main uses of evaluation at the program level include

- **Program improvement:** Evaluations provide the foundation for strategic planning and help programs systematically explore strengths and weaknesses in an effort to improve the program. Program improvement should be a goal of *all* program evaluations. Program self-assessments and participant satisfaction surveys (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) are useful tools for program improvement. Relevant questions for program improvement include: *What are we doing well? What areas do we need to improve? Are the participants satisfied with what we are providing and how we are doing our work? Are we making a significant contribution to the well-being of program participants?*

- **Family involvement:** While many people think of family involvement as an isolated activity in which parents sit on a decision-making body, it is more constructive to think of family involvement as something that should be infused throughout *all program activities*, including evaluation. Participating families can help in shaping the evaluation, deciding on which questions and outcomes are important to them, constructing questionnaires and other evaluation tools, collecting and analyzing data, and contributing to the ultimate reports and presentations on evaluation findings.

- **Accountability:** Often, evaluations are undertaken at the request of a funding source. The fundamental goal of these types of evaluation is to demonstrate the value of the program. Accountability is an extremely important function of an evaluation and one that places many pressing demands on the program leaders. In order to continue to receive funds, the agencies or other bodies providing support must be satisfied with the job being done at the program level. From a funder's perspective, it is reasonable to ask, "Am I getting the most return on my investment by investing in this family support program?" Other questions would include: *What measurable impacts is this program achieving? Is this program cost effective? Does the program work? Should I continue to invest in this program?*

- **Basis for public information:** The materials created through the evaluation process can also be used to describe the program and its outcomes to the community and to other agencies. This information can be used for a variety of purposes, including providing information on mission, goals, and outcomes for possible collaborative partners; providing information and education for the public; and marketing the program. By taking advantage of all these purposes, the program can make best use of the resources expended on the evaluation.

- **Applied research:** Sometimes, programs partner with researchers to explore a specific aspect of human development or of the program (e.g., Is parent involvement in the program connected to better outcomes for children? Does the program seem to work better for specific types of families?). In order to be constructive for the program and the participants, research projects should be consistent with the goals of the program and should support its philosophy and activities. At the same time, the center needs to be committed to research and to the rigor that it may involve. Partnerships with researchers can enable centers to find out more about the program and to access evaluation and research resources.

Guidelines for Family Support Evaluation

Some evaluators maintain that evaluation is an "objective" science, untainted by the beliefs and approaches of the evaluator. However, many evaluators now acknowledge that evaluation is also a subjective art that is shaped by the values and beliefs of all the people participating in the evaluation.

The beliefs of the members of the evaluation team will affect the way in which an evaluation is conducted, and will inevitably shape the ultimate outcome of the evaluation. Program directors and other stakeholders should be careful in their selection of evaluators, techniques, and instruments. While the program does not want a "rubber stamp" evaluation, it is important to choose an evaluator who understands family support and the complexities of family support evaluation.

One way to explore values in family support settings is to compare the evaluation team's approach, techniques, and instruments with the Principles of Family Support Practice. Below are some key practices and values that illustrate how these principles, shown in bold, can be realized in an evaluation context.

1. **Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.**

   - The evaluation is participatory—families, staff, and other stakeholders are engaged in all stages of the process.
   - The evaluation team works to make the evaluation understandable and accessible to all stakeholders and to the general public.
   - Participant satisfaction measures are key components of all family support evaluations.

2. **Staff enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.**

   - Evaluation is seen as a learning opportunity and supports the development of the program and the families within it.

3. **Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.**

   - Outcome frameworks utilize "promotional indicators," indicators that focus on assets and strengths. These indicators more accurately reflect the prevention and strengths-oriented approaches of family support than do traditional deficit-oriented indicators.
   - Evaluation assesses and reports the strengths of the program as well as any areas for improvement.

4. **Policies and practices affirm and strengthen families' ethnic, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.**

   - Evaluation is conducted in ways that are consistent with the values and culture of the families in the program.
   - Evaluation is conducted in the primary language of participating families.
   - The evaluation team is representative of and inclusive of the program participants; the team explicitly works to overcome possible cultural barriers.

5. **Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.**

- The evaluation team effectively includes community members as decision-makers.
- The evaluation approach includes a focus on community-level factors and recognizes the need to place program evaluation within a community context.
- Evaluation is a stimulus to a more community-centered and collaborative approach to working with families.

6. **Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.**

- Evaluation is used as a tool for program and community improvement and the participating families feel like the evaluation serves their purposes.
- Families take a leadership role in evaluation and are seen as primary stakeholders in the process.
- Programs and evaluators advocate among funders and decision makers for more responsive and useful evaluation approaches.

7. **Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.**

- Evaluations recognize that families are often connected to multiple programs and systems: They (1) measure the ability of those programs and systems to work effectively together and (2) do not assign responsibility for results inappropriately to a single program.
- Evaluations measure the ability of families to connect with and use formal and informal resources.

8. **Programs are flexible and continually responsive to family and community issues.**

- Evaluations use multiple methods to more fully capture what is taking place in a program or initiative.
- Evaluations are tailored to the needs of specific programs and communities, with specific methodologies and tools matched to the needs and goals of the program.
- Evaluation results are used for continuous improvement and strategic planning.

9. **Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.**

- Like all program activities, evaluation is conducted in ways that are consistent with the principles of family support.
- Evaluation is theory-based and requires programs and communities to articulate a vision for how change is going to take place.
- Evaluation is useful for programs, not burdensome, and information is provided in a timely manner so that it can be used to improve the program.

It is important for program staff and participants to ask themselves, *What are the key beliefs that guide our program? With our principles or beliefs in mind, what should our evaluation look like? What kind of evaluator will best serve our program?* (Please see the worksheets at the end of this chapter to answer these questions.)

Family Support Outcomes and Indicators

Evaluation cannot be discussed without the use of two terms:

- An *outcome* is a condition of well-being for a child, family, or community that has a broad and common understanding.
- An *indicator* is a measure that helps quantify the achievement of an outcome.

The process of defining specific outcomes and indicators for your program is critical to a useful evaluation and is described in detail later in this chapter. It may be helpful, however, to have a basic idea of examples of outcomes and indicators at this point. A sample set of outcomes and indicators for a family support center is included below. The articulation of these elements is one of the most controversial and rapidly developing areas of family support. There is no universal set of outcomes and indicators that are appropriate to all family support programs.

Sample Indicators and Outcomes for Family Support Centers

Long-Term Outcome Area	Sample Indicators
Healthy births	• percentage of children born low birthweight • percentage of women receiving prenatal care in the first trimester • percentage of women making healthy lifestyle choices during pregnancy (e.g., smoking cessation, reduction in alcohol intake, dietary changes)
Physically and emotionally healthy children, adolescents, and adults	• percentage of two-year-olds fully immunized • percentage of children with medical homes • percentage of adults, children, and adolescents exercising regularly • percentage of adolescents and adults using tobacco products • percentage of adults within recommended weight range for height
Children ready for school	• percentage of children passing pre-K test • percentage of children retained at least once prior to grade three
Children succeeding in school	• percentage of youth graduating from high school • percentage of students who are absent 10 or more days annually
Youth engaging in positive behavior	• percentage of youth involved in extracurricular activities • percentage of youth participating in volunteer activities • percentage of teens not using alcohol in the last 30 days

Safe and stable families	• percentage of births to single parents • percentage of children who can identify at least one meaningful and caring relationship with an adult
Adequate income	• percentage children qualifying for free and reduced lunches • percentage of families living in poverty • percentage of TANF recipients leaving public assistance because of employment or higher incomes
Safe, supportive, and engaged communities	• percentage of adults and youth participating in volunteer activities • percentage of children attending licensed childcare • violent crimes per 100,000 population

What Do Evaluations Measure?

There are three basic types of program evaluations, each measuring a different aspect of the program. These are: *fit* (sometimes called context), *quality* (process or implementation), and *results* (outcome or impact). All three types of evaluation are essential and should be seen as interrelated and dynamic. While the organization of ideas requires us to distinguish these types of evaluation and to present them in distinct sections, the reality of program evaluation is that the different evaluation activities will be inter-related, overlapping, and complex. It is important to remember that evaluation is not a distinct and discrete program event; it is a long-term process by which centers continually explore programs and how to improve them.

Each type of evaluation is described below, including an overview, key questions, and ways to collect the information. Ways to collect information are annotated at the end of this chapter, where they are listed alphabetically. The evaluation team must choose sources of information and methods of collecting data that are best suited to their particular evaluation. Each way of collecting information has advantages and disadvantages, and it is advisable to use multiple methods within a single evaluation.

Fit

Information needs to be obtained on whether the program that is being implemented is a logical program model considering the environment in which it is being implemented, who it is targeting, and what is known about quality practice in the area. This is also sometimes called context evaluation. A variety of nonprogram factors, such as local economy or other community characteristics or state-level policies and practices, affect families and the quality of family programs at the local level. For example, if a major employer leaves or enters an area, the economic impact on families is far-reaching and may affect the findings of an evaluation.

Because such outside influences can be powerful and can affect programs in both positive and negative ways, it is important to try to understand these influences and place the program evaluation in the context of these larger influences. By seeking to understand these factors, the evaluation team can more clearly tell the story of the families and the program, making the evaluation come to life. What makes a program effective at the local level is often a combination of good ideas, local heroes, collaboration, and community involvement. Capturing these factors is an important contribution to the larger evaluation process.

Most programs would understand fit evaluation to consist of a community needs and resources assessment conducted by a team that involves program staff, participants, and other key stakeholders. Some key steps are to (1) establish a community planning team, (2) define community boundaries, (3) develop a statistical profile, (4) assess needs from residents' perspectives, and (5) identify assets and resources. More information on community needs and resources assessment is included in chapter 2.

Key Questions

- What about the community and/or the umbrella organization hinders or helps the program in achieving its goals?
- Which factors outside of the program (e.g., local economy, federal funding) have the greatest impact on the program?
- What can the program do to build strengths or address challenges outside of the program that affect program quality?
- What are the values of the program? How do these values translate into services for families and the community?
- Does the program meet specific needs of the community or of the target population?
- Does the program build on existing services in the community without duplicating them?
- Does the program take into account available information about what works to achieve the designated outcomes?
- Is the program designed to be culturally relevant to the needs of the target population?
- Does the program take into account the political and social realities of the community?
- Are participants involved in planning services that are offered?

Ways to Collect the Information

- data on similar programs
- demographic information on the target community
- existing records (service utilization information)
- interviews and focus groups with the target population
- interviews with key stakeholders in the community
- needs assessment (see chapter 2)
- resources assessment (see chapter 2)

Quality

Quality evaluation gathers information on whether the program is being implemented in a manner that is likely to indicate success. Also referred to as process evaluation, implementation evaluation, or formative evaluation, it directly addresses program delivery, improvement, and refinement.

Key Questions

- What are the critical components and activities of the program?
- How do these components connect to the goals and intended outcomes of the program?
- What aspects of the programs are facilitating success or acting as barriers to achieving intended program outcomes?
- Are we implementing the program as we planned?
- Are we reaching our target population?
- Are participants happy with the services they receive?

Eight Elements of Successful Evaluation

1. **Parent/Community Involvement:** Involve program participants and community members in the needs and resources assessment. Reach out to these groups through focus groups, community meetings, dinners, or other informal gatherings.

2. **Youth Involvement:** Ask youth to join the evaluation and share their opinions. For example, youth can be asked to develop statements of their needs and concerns, which can be used as part of the larger planning process. Too often, youth are considered to be the problem, not part of the solution, and this perception only increases when we do not engage them in constructive projects in their communities. Youth can provide energy and creativity that leads to innovative solutions to community issues.

3. **Strengths Orientation:** Make sure that you focus on strengths in addition to needs. Communities and programs need to know what they are doing well in order to maintain energy and find ways to make lives better. The identification of family and community resources is an important step in acknowledging the ability of families to take positive steps in their own lives.

4. **Multilayered Data Collection:** While many researchers seek to collect scientific information that can be turned into numbers, this is only one kind of useful information to collect. In addition to more formal methods, conduct interviews, group meetings, and brainstorming sessions to see what matters to people in the program and community. Find creative ways (e.g., telling stories, drawing pictures, etc.) for families to describe their surroundings and what is important to them. As you collect more kinds of information, however, you will need to find ways to organize and integrate this information so that it is useful for the program.

5. **Consensus Building and Community Building:** Think of the evaluation as a way to gain consensus and mobilize resources around issues that matter to the community. By using the information in constructive ways, you will demonstrate to the community that your program is a constructive partner in the life of the community and that the program is responsive to community needs.

6. **Looking Beyond Social Services:** While those providing programs naturally reflect on their own role and the role of human services in the lives of families, they rarely consider what other less formal assets and resources may affect the families, the program, and the community. The evaluation should tap into these less formal resources, including the business and faith communities. One of the important reasons to conduct an evaluation is to understand the community in a broader way than we do every day.

7. **Community-Friendly Process:** The language and perspective of researchers, evaluators, and academics does not always make sense to community members and program participants. Therefore, you should make an explicit effort to create a process and language that are shaped by the community and the evaluators in a way that communicates to a broad audience. The process should be friendly for all involved and should be directly useful for the program and the community.

8. **Evaluation Report:** Think of the fit evaluation as the introduction to your evaluation report—this information provides the background necessary for the reader to understand the program and its surroundings.

- Are there things we could improve upon?
- Do staff members receive the training and support they need?
- Are participants using the services we offer?
- Is service delivery consistent with what we know about quality practice?
- Are participants receiving the amount of service they need?
- What specific tasks or activities need to happen for this program to be successful?
- Are we working effectively with other programs in the community?
- Are we providing services in a culturally responsive manner?

Ways to Collect the Information

- existing records (service utilization information and resource and referral tracking forms)
- focus groups with participants
- interviews with participants
- observations of the program
- participant satisfaction surveys
- peer review
- program self-assessment
- staff feedback forms

Results

Probably the most familiar kind of evaluation, results evaluation is used to gather information on how the program has affected participants (this kind of evaluation is also referred to as impact evaluation, outcome evaluation, or summative evaluation). Results evaluations flow naturally out of fit evaluation by utilizing the profile of community needs and resources. Most of the time, programs wish to evaluate both short-term and long-term outcomes.

The essential question posed by results evaluation is, "What are the measurable effects or outcomes of the program?" But in keeping with the principles of family support practice, an equally important question to answer is, "In what ways and how much did the lives of families and children change because of the program?" Results evaluations, and the frameworks for them, have received increasing attention as many state and federal programs move towards "outcome-based" or "results-based" accountability. Programs associated with state and federal systems are under increasing pressure to demonstrate changes in important outcomes for children and families. While programs must be accountable to funders and decision makers, program improvement is an equally important goal for results evaluations.

Key Questions

- What are the critical short- and long-term outcomes that the program is trying to achieve?
- What are the changes we hoped to see?
- Have the changes been what we expected?
- What impact is the project having on participants, staff, the umbrella organization, and the community?
- What benchmarks or indicators can be used to measure these outcomes, changes, and impact?
- How will we measure how well we are achieving each outcome that we are trying to achieve?

- To what extent have the lives of program participants changed in relationship to these benchmarks or indicators?
- What unexpected impact has the program had?
- Are there other ways the lives of program participants have changed because of the services they've received?
- What are the differences between those participants who have been impacted and those who have not?
- What other factors have impacted the lives of program participants?
- Can we show a relationship between the results we have seen and the services the program has provided?
- What impact has the program had on the community?
- Why haven't we seen the results we hoped for? (if applicable)
- What are we learning about supporting the type of change that we would like to see?

Ways to Collect the Information

- assessment tools developed by researchers or programs (pre- and post tests)
- case studies
- community indicators (tracked regularly)
- interviews (exit interviews with participants)
- interviews with those who know the participants
- participant self-reports
- program observations
- tracking participant behavior

A Process for Family-Supportive Evaluation

Convening an Evaluation Team

The evaulation team guides the ongoing strategic planning and evaluation activities of the program. It should be broadly representative of the community and should include program participants, youth, community members, and program staff. This group may also be responsible for selecting evaluators who have training, expertise, and experience that is critical to creating a useful and workable evaluation plan. Select carefully so that the best possible fit is achieved between the program, the evaluation team, and the outside evaluators—who, ideally, become an integral part of the team.

Creating a Theory of Change

Creating a theory of change helps programs gain greater clarity on what they are doing and what changes they expect to produce. In addition, theories of change help programs define the ways in which they need to measure results during the evaluation.

All social programs are implemented within the larger context of other programs and broader societal influences. Therefore, it is very difficult to attribute any changes in the participating families directly to any one program. Typically, most scientific evaluators and researchers address this difficulty by comparing changes in families who take part in the program (program families) to changes in the families who did not take part in the program (comparison or control families). If these two groups of families are fairly similar at the outset, then the measurable differences between the two groups after the program has been implemented can usually be attributed to the program itself. However, most programs are not in a position to utilize comparison or control group designs. Such designs are more difficult, are more resource-intensive, and require programs to deny services to comparison families, a practice that is often contrary to the basic mission of the program.

Theory-based evaluation (see Chen, 1990 and Connell and Kubisch, 1998) is one way for programs to be clearer about their impact without utilizing comparison groups. Developing a "theory of change" requires the program to clarify the two basic questions of *what* the program does and *how* the program does it. The theory then connects what the program does and how it does it to the outcomes the program hopes to achieve.

One simple way to begin to develop the program's theory of change is to translate the *what* and *how* of the program into "if … then" statements that describe what is expected to happen if the program engages in certain activities and delivers its services in certain ways, as in the examples below:

What the Program Does
"If the program offers parent education courses, then participating parents will have more knowledge of parenting and will discipline their children in less physical ways."

How the Program Does it
"If the parent education courses are chosen by parents and parents help to shape the content of the workshops, then parents and staff will feel more equal and parents will be more likely to attend these courses."

Such statements of program theory can be simple or complex, depending upon the program and the goal under discussion. The task of the evaluation is then to measure the extent to which (1) *what* the program does and (2) *how* it does it leads to the proposed outcomes. By explicitly addressing these connections, the evaluator can more clearly reason about the effectiveness of the program. These basic frameworks have been termed theories of change or program logic models.

The best place to start this discussion, especially from a strategic planning perspective, is to identify the ultimate outcomes the program is trying to achieve and work backwards from there to the *what* and *how* of achieving these goals (see chapter 2 for more information on strategic planning).

Step 1: Identify Long-Term Program Outcomes

Using the list below, define the major long-term outcomes your program hopes to achieve (Schorr 1995):

- healthy births
- physically and emotionally healthy children, adolescents, and adults
- children ready for school
- children succeeding in school
- youth engaging in positive behavior
- safe and stable families
- adequate income
- safe, supportive, and engaged communities

For example, if you have a health education program, then one of your program outcomes should focus on the health status of the target population. It is usually best to start by focusing on a few outcomes rather than on all of the possible outcomes.

Once these outcome areas have been outlined in a general way, the group may choose to create more precise or refined outcomes, especially in areas that are central to the program. For example, in a Head Start program, both *social* readiness and *cognitive* readiness might be used to characterize readiness for school. The more sophisticated your program is in any given area, the more likely that you will have more refined outcomes.

One of the best ways to identify program outcomes is to convene a meeting of program staff, participants, and other community members to discuss the major goals of the program. An inclusive process contributes to better dialogue, understanding of the program, and long-term buy-in to the program and the evaluation. In addition, the evaluation team should be sure to include any outcomes that are expected by the agencies providing funding for the program.

During such a meeting, the group can address the following question: *What are the major long-term outcomes this program hopes to achieve?* For example:

1. Outcome 1: Children socially ready for school
2. Outcome 2: Children cognitively ready for school
3. Outcome 3: ____________________
4. etc.

Outcomes like these are usually very difficult to achieve, and programs should be realistic about how long it might take to accomplish them. For this reason your theory of change should also identify short-term and intermediate outcomes. Achievement of these outcomes can be evaluated over a shorter period of time and can be used to evaluate progress toward achieving long-term goals.

Step 2: Identify Short-Term and Intermediate Program Outcomes

Because long-term outcomes are difficult to achieve, it is important that the program identify short-term and intermediate outcomes that will be achieved on the way to the long-term outcomes. For example, if the long-term outcome revolves around children's readiness for school, short-term outcomes may involve parents' attendance at workshops on home-school communication and parent involvement. Intermediate outcomes may include parents' changes in attitudes towards the school and parent involvement. Other intermediate outcomes might include changes in behavior, such as amount of time reading with the child, that are thought to contribute to the ultimate achievement of the long-term outcome.

It is important to identify short-term outcomes that are realistic and can be measured relatively easily. The evaluation team should engage in a conversation about what the program is doing to achieve the specific short-term outcomes, discussed below.

Step 3: Identify Activities for the Achievement of Short-Term Outcomes

In order to understand program effects, it is necessary to make clear and precise connections between specific program activities and the intended outcomes. This can be accomplished by answering the following question: *What activities will the program engage in to achieve its short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes?*

Examples of answers to this question could be:

- We will offer parent-child classes on how to encourage children to interact well with other children.
- We will expose children to a variety of social situations through play groups, recreation events, and childcare to help prepare them for future challenges.

This is an excellent opportunity to brainstorm about whether the program is taking the steps necessary to change the outcomes of interest, especially in the short-run. If your program's current activities are not accomplishing desired outcomes, then either new program offerings are necessary or the program needs to reconsider whether its desired outcomes are realistic. If the program is engaging in activities that lead to no clear outcome, then these activities should be reconsidered as well.

Step 4: Identify Beliefs, Principles, and Assumptions

The beliefs, principles, and assumptions of each program affect what the program offers and how interactions take place between staff and participants.

When analyzing the beliefs, principles, and assumptions of a program, it is important to ask: *What do we believe as a center and as staff? What beliefs guide our work?* The next logical question to ask is: *What do our practices tell us about our beliefs?* By explicitly addressing the link between philosophy, activities, and eventual outcomes, the program will be able to more clearly explain its effects and make appropriate changes. In her work on theories of change (1997), Carol Weiss identified the following examples of program assumptions that guide program activities:

- You can make an impact with limited funds.
- An effective program requires the involvement of local citizens.
- Comprehensive services will lead to success.
- Services for adults confer benefits on children.

This final link, the focus on program beliefs and assumptions, may apply to the entire program as opposed to a single outcome. For example, the fundamental guiding beliefs of the program are likely to run throughout the entire program.

All of these steps, from identifying long-term outcomes to clarifying program assumptions, come together to form the program's theory of change. A good theory of change should be (Connell and Kubisch 1998)

- **Plausible:** Does the theory make sense? Is it logical that the proposed activities will lead to the proposed outcomes?
- **Doable:** Does the program have the resources to make it happen? Is it realistic?
- **Testable:** Is the theory specific enough to be tested in ways that the evaluator can meaningfully track progress?

An evaluation based on a theory of change helps those involved with the program

- describe the program and its approach to delivering services and interacting with families
- clarify the connection between specific program characteristics and outcomes achieved
- understand the importance of their beliefs, principles, and assumptions
- separate the role of the program from the influence of other possible factors

The following is an example of a theory of change for a program engaged in parent leadership development (Connell and Kubisch 1998, 24–25).

Activities	Short-Term Outcomes/Quality Indicators	Intermediate Outcomes/Indicators of Change	Long-Term Outcomes/Indicators of Results
Leadership development programs	Residents trained in conflict resolution, community organizing, and leadership skills	New nontraditional leadership emerging in neighborhood activities	Residents running most of the significant civic, cultural, economic, social, and political institutions in the community

Creating a Measurement Plan

When the theory of change has been articulated, the evaluation team must then decide how to go about measuring and assessing all of the outcomes identified.

Step 1: Identify Indicators for Each Outcome Area

What indicators of progress will you use to measure how well the outcome is being achieved? Using the example shown at the end of the above section on theories of change, this question could be broken down in the following way:

- **Short-Term Outcome:** How will we know if parents are being trained?

- **Intermediate Outcome:** Are behavior and attitudes changing in ways that are consistent with larger outcome? How will we know if new leadership is being developed in the neighborhood?

- **Long-Term Outcome:** How will we know if residents are running activities in the community?

With respect to each type of outcome, the question is answered by choosing an indicator, a group of indicators, or a specific measure that researchers or practitioners believe is connected to the outcome. In this case, the evaluation team may conduct simple counts of individuals trained, construct a questionnaire, or convene a focus group to ask the relevant questions. By measuring those indicators over time, evaluators witness whether progress is being made. Indicators must be concrete and measurable. Your indicators should possess several key characteristics:

- **Communication Power:** Do people understand what the indicator means? If you explained the indicator to the general public, would they understand?

- **Proxy Power:** To what extent does the indicator correlate with the outcome? Is there a strong relationship between the indicator and the outcome? Is the indicator a better predictor of the outcome than other available indicators?

- **Data Power:** Is the information readily available? Is the information meaningful?

- **Program Fit:** Does the indicator closely correspond to the goals of the program? Can it be measured or collected in ways that support the philosophy of the program?

While the first three of these characteristics were developed for community- and state-wide evaluation, they apply just as well to programs. The indicators you select should communicate to people, have a strong and established relationship to the outcome, and be collected using methods that allow them to be meaningful. It is important that the indicators and the evaluation techniques in general reflect the strengths-based and promotional perspectives of the program.

Step Two: Select Precise Measures of Progress

While states and communities often use indicators like those described above to evaluate the overall health and well-being of families, many programs not only do that, but measure more precisely progress on specific issues that are important to them. For example, a program that seeks to reduce alcohol and drug abuse might measure participant attitudes and behaviors related to alcohol and drug use.

Instrument Selection
One of the first steps when pursuing more refined measures is to identify a limited number of interest areas that warrant further attention. It is usually best to pursue evaluation in a single key area, working through the evaluation of that area before pursuing others. These areas might include parent involvement, parent/child interaction, parent discipline practices, child development, job readiness, informal supports, and so on. In each area, there are appropriate instruments that measure behavior and attitudes and which therefore indicate program progress. As your program pursues more detailed data collection, you may find that you and your team need to obtain training or that the program must spend money to gather the data.

Timing

Your evaluation team must decide when and how often you are going to administer certain evaluation instruments. Given that most programs cannot utilize program/comparison group designs, tracking change over time is often the primary method for assessing program effectiveness. This simply means that the same instrument will be administered at regular intervals and change will be charted in order to explore changes in the participants. In order to strengthen the program's ability to understand these changes, it is often useful to collect different kinds of information and information from different groups of people. The more kinds of information are collected, the better the ability to connect changes in families to the influences of the program.

Analyzing Results

Analyzing the findings of your program evaluation can be very complex or very simple. Some programs engage in simple analyses of descriptive statistics (such as mean scores or average income levels) to begin to understand the effects of the program. Other programs engage in more complex statistical analyses that require the expertise of statisticians, researchers, and computer experts. However, as a caution to programs, when complex statistics are used, it is crucial that the evaluators be able to translate this information into simpler language so that the program can make use of it.

The key to effective analysis is to make it useful for the program. Usually, this requires swift progress from data collection to data analysis to the presentation and use of findings. It helps to identify very specifically before the evaluation begins what questions and relationships are important. In evaluations in which you may have hundreds of variables, you can spend months and years analyzing all of the possible relationships.

More specific information on analyzing the results of evaluations as they are gathered is available in *How Are We Doing? A Program Self Assessment Toolkit for the Family Support Field* and *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment.*

Communicating Findings

It is important that the findings and ideas that are raised in all portions of the evaluation are formalized, written down, and accessible and useful. With funders and decision makers eager for the demonstration of outcomes, many reports neglect quality evaluations. However, quality and results or outcomes are intertwined and neither should be slighted. The quality findings will help the program understand why certain results may or may not have been achieved.

Evaluation reports may take several forms, even from the same evaluation. While many reports are oriented towards the funding source, few are designed to be distributed within the community and the program itself. Creating a shortened, more user-friendly version is a great way to show the people who participated in the evaluation that it actually amounted to something. There is nothing more frustrating for staff or for participants than the feeling that they are doing work for work's sake. When evaluations are used more broadly, communicate findings, and contribute to strategic planning, people are more enthusiastic about devoting their time and resources to the evaluation efforts.

The following is a general outline for an evaluation report:

I. **The Issue Your Program is Trying to Address**
  A. who it impacts
  B. what causes it
  C. how your theory of change applies to this issue

II. **The Context in Which Your Program Takes Place**
  A. your community (description)
  B. your target population
  C. context changes that occurred during the evaluation

III. **What Happened**
  A. your logic model
  B. services or activities delivered
  C. difficulties encountered

IV. **What You Learned**
  A. successes
  B. areas for improvement

V. **Action Plan**
  A. what you will change to improve your program

VI. **Appendices**
  A. evaluation methodology (description)
  B. copies of forms or tools used to collect data

For program evaluation information to be truly useful it needs to be understood and used by all of the key stakeholders in your program, including staff members, participating families, board members, community partners, and others. Broad communication will help you spread the word about program successes—thus building the credibility of your program. It will also provide a broader range of feedback on the question of how the program can learn from and improve those things that have not worked. The following are some communication tools that can be used to disseminate evaluation findings:

- your center's brochure
- proposals
- reports to funders
- collaborative meetings
- peer review sessions
- reports to or meetings with the board
- legislative breakfasts with public officials
- community meetings
- staff meetings
- participant newsletters
- articles in local newspaper

Data Collection Methods

Assessment Tools Developed by Researchers

There are a number of research-based assessments, checklists, tests, and scales that assess different aspects of parental or child functioning. These tools track and monitor behavioral, attitudinal, and knowledge characteristics of participants. Advantages of using these tools in your program evaluation include the fact that much of the work has already been done for you, and many of these tools have been tested for reliability and validity. Their research base and the fact that they have been tested help establish the credibility of evaluations based on their use. Several factors must be considered, however:

- **Cost**: These tests and scales are produced after years of expensive research, testing, and information gathering, and many are expensive to use.
- **Fit**: The test or scale must fit your programs and activities and theory of change.
- **Administration**: Many available tests or scales require a specific background or set of skills in order to be administered correctly. Ask the publisher about the training or credentials needed to administer the test or scale.
- **Intrusiveness**: The test or scale may ask more questions than are necessary to measure only the changes your program is trying to achieve. If used as is, such a test or scale can damage relationships with participants.
- **Fit with principles**: The test or scale and what it measures may not reflect your program's values, its way of operating, or the principles of family support practice.
- **Time**: The test or scale may take too much time to administer, based on staff and participant availability.

Many programs use these tools in a pre- and post-test format. That is, they use the same tool twice, first when the participant is just starting the program and then again when he or she is leaving the program or has been engaged with it for a set period of time. The use of pre- and post-testing can help show how a participant has changed over time.

Sample Tests & Scales

- Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory
- Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale
- Family Assessment Device
- Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment
- Infant Caregiving Inventory
- Index of Parental Attitudes
- Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors
- Nursing Child Assessment Training
- Parent As A Teacher Inventory
- Parental Acceptance Rejection Questionnaire
- Parent-Child Areas of Change Questionnaire
- Parent Perception of Child Profile
- Social Support Questionnaire
- Therapy Attitude Inventory
- Tennessee Self-Concept Scale

From the Washington Council for Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect

Assessment Tools Developed by Programs

Some family support programs develop assessments, checklists, tests, and scales themselves. The advantage of doing this is that these tools can be designed specifically for the activities and services that your program offers. The disadvantage is that measuring attitude, knowledge, and behavior is difficult. Creating a tool that measures exactly what you want to measure is hard and requires a sound knowledge of research methodology.

Case Studies

Rather than aggregating data from all participants, case studies tell a detailed story about the program's impact on one or a few participants, helping others learn about the complexity of an issue, the impact of a program, and the factors that promote and limit success. Case studies give a sense of what really happens in participants' lives and how the program works.

You can use case studies to put other information included in an evaluation report into context. They can put a human face on data and engage readers or the audience with what your program. You may want to use case studies as a primary way of analyzing and evaluating the program particularly when it would be difficult or meaningless to generalize program data, for example if

- your program serves a very small number of individuals or families
- your program offers services or activities that are extremely tailored to the needs of individual participants or families
- the impact that your program is having on participants is extremely subtle and complex

The content of the case studies varies from program to program and according to the audience for the evaluation. You may want to consider answering the following questions:

- What are the basic characteristics of the individual or family (e.g., ages, family structure, demographic information)?
- What brought the individual or family to the program?
- What services or activities did they use?
- What was their relationship with members of the staff initially, and did it change over time?
- What was their level of participation?
- What impact did the services and activities have on them?
- What else was going on in their lives that may have affected them during this period?
- What do you anticipate for their future?
- What were the program's successes in working with them?
- In what ways could the program have been more helpful?

There are important issues to consider when using case studies. It is very important to maintain family trust by obtaining families' permission to use their stories in your evaluation report. If necessary, change names and omit any identifying information. Make clear to them that this will be the case. Also, consider developing case studies together with families. They can help you understand which parts of the experience were most relevant and had the most impact, and review and suggest revisions to what you've written. Finally, don't only write case studies of success stories. One of the primary purposes of evaluation is to learn about how you can improve your program. Looking in-depth at a couple of instances in which problems occurred or in which the program did not live up to expectations can help the program learn new strategies for change.

Community Indicators

Programs often use community indicators to track changes among children and families in the community in which they are working. The advantage of community-level indicators is that one can often use data that is already being collected from other sources — about, for example, school achievement, poverty rates, or home ownership rates. This removes much of the burden of data collection from the program. The difficulty with using community-level data, however, is that unless you are truly serving every family in the community, you are measuring your program's effectiveness on the basis of outcomes for families that may have never walked through your door. In general, it is problematic to use community-level data unless your program is truly serving a large proportion of the families in the community or conducting an evaluation as part of a community-wide collaboration of programs that is doing so.

Data on Similar Programs

While data on similarly structured programs cannot truly be used to evaluate your program, it can be used, in the absence of other evaluation data, to make the case for your program. Keep aware of published evaluations in the field: they can both help you think about how to structure your own future evaluations and give you relevant data to cite (even if it is not from your own program).

Existing Records

Much of the data needed to conduct evaluation can be collected from documents generated in the day-to-day business of the family support center. Using such information in the evaluation can reduce the amount of paperwork for staff and participants, tie everyday programs and activities to evaluation strategies, and underline the importance of long-term outcomes in everyday programs and activities. Records that might be useful could include

- agendas
- assessment forms
- calendars
- case record data
- family development plans
- financial records
- intake forms
- meeting minutes
- participant goal statements
- resource and referral tracking forms
- sign-in and attendance sheets
- service planning sheets
- service utilization information

Focus Groups

Focus groups can be used to learn in a structured way from a group of participants. A focus group typically consists of seven to 12 people who participate in a structured interview in which a moderator asks questions. The group dynamic is used to provoke discussion of a particular issue or of the needs of a specific population and to reveal attitudes and perceptions. Members are selected on the basis of shared characteristics or belonging to a group whose input is needed for the evaluation. A facilitator and recorder also are present. In-depth information on running focus groups is included in *Know Your Community*. *How Are We Doing?* also includes questions that can be used to guide focus groups. See the resources listed at the end of this chapter.

Interviews

Interviews via telephone or in person allow for frank discussion and may be useful to use with those who are uncomfortable participating in group discussions or focus groups or who have a tendency to dominate group discussions. In-depth guidance on conducting interviews is included in *Know Your Community*. See the resources listed at the end of this chapter.

Exit interviews, in particular, are often used with participants when they are about to leave the program or end a particular type of service, such as a parent education class. Exit interviews provide an opportunity to reflect with participants about what they gained from the experience, what did not work for them, and what can be used for the future.

When using interviews and other qualitative data collection methods, think through in advance how you will aggregate, analyze, and present the information. Make sure to keep questions consistent across interviews and to train interviewers to ask questions in the same way. This helps ensure that the information you get in the end is somewhat consistent and can be viewed as a whole.

Observations

By watching people or programs in action, observers help evaluate the program based on what is actually happening. A lot of programs use observations as a strategy for process evaluation—using observations as an opportunity to identify ways in which programs and activities can be improved. Additionally, a number of assessments, for example, those measuring child and family functioning, are based on observations of the child or the child and parent interacting. When using observation as a data collection method, it is important to reduce the effects of observer bias. This means that observers need to be given training on what to look for and how to evaluate what they see. If you are using multiple observers it is important for them to use consistent criteria when making observations. A more detailed discussion of strategies for observation is included in *How Are We Doing?* See the resources section at the end of this chapter.

Participant Satisfaction Surveys

Participant satisfaction surveys are an important way for programs that value responsiveness to and respect for program participants to find out what the program is doing well and what it needs to improve. Properly conducted and accompanied by follow-through on participant suggestions, efforts to gauge participant satisfaction contribute not only to the evaluation but to a participant-oriented atmosphere at the program. For more information on surveys and questionnaires as a method of collecting information, see the section on questionnaires below.

Participant Self-Reports

Participant self-reports collect information on how the participant feels the program impacted him or her. The advantage of participant self-reports is that they allow you to hear about the effectiveness of the program from those who participated in it. The disadvantage is that participants may report more positive change than has actually occurred, perhaps because they want to be kind to the staff who worked with them or because, having participated in the activities of the program, they are invested in it. Some of these concerns can be addressed in the quality and specificity of the questions being used.

Peer Review

In a peer review meeting, staff, participants, and peers from outside the program—such as program providers from within and outside of the community and funders—engage in discussion regarding how the program is doing. Peer review is presented as an opportunity to reflect, exchange ideas, reassess practices, and direct the program toward positive solutions. Besides informing the evaluation, these meetings also can contribute to stronger links between the center and others in the community and can make their resources more available to center participants. Efforts must be taken to create a constructive atmosphere among people who can be trusted to act with the best interests of the program at heart.

Program Self-Assessment

Program self-assessment is a systematic process in which a team of stakeholders who are involved in the program reflect and gather information with the primary purpose of improving the program. The process can call for a number of information-gathering tools, including: program self-assessment booklets, participant questionnaires, staff questionnaires, board questionnaires, focus groups, program observation, and materials review. All of these are included in *How Are We Doing?* See the resources section at the end of this chapter.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires or surveys are used to collect written information regarding program or client attributes. They allow participants to give responses with or without being identified. There are a number of general considerations to keep in mind when creating and using questionnaires. The types of questions used will affect the quality of the data you collect. Open-ended questions (e.g. "What do you feel is the most important issue in your community today?") allow for unstructured and personalized responses, but they are difficult to tabulate and may discourage responses because they take time to complete. Closed-ended questions, such as yes-or-no or multiple choice questions (e.g., "Which of the following services would you most like to see offered in your community?") are easy to respond to and report but may not fully reflect the respondent's feelings or knowledge. They also can protect respondents from identification in the case of anonymous surveys.

Other major considerations when creating and distributing surveys include the need for field testing, length of questionnaires, language appropriateness, ease of completion, sensitivity of questions presented, layout, writing a clear introductory cover page, and effective and sensitive dissemination.

In-depth information and model questionnaires to distribute to parents, staff, and board members are included in *How Are We Doing?* See the resources section at the end of this chapter.

Tracking Participant Behavior

Programs can also track participant behavior to identify if specific behavioral changes have occurred after participation in the program. This process can be as simple as using a survey or participant self-report to identify whether or not the parent is, for example, reading to his or her child more often. Or it can be as complicated as using a diary format to identify how often a participant engages in a particular type of behavior, smoking, for example. The advantage of using behavior change is that it goes beyond knowledge and attitude questions to look at how the program has truly affected how participants act. The disadvantage, of course, is that the data is only as good as the data collection method and on how honest participants are willing to be about their behavior.

Worksheet 1
Developing Short-Term Outcome Statements

In the spaces provided, fill in the time frame, target population, impacted population, and outcome. Then, combine these into a statement. An example is provided.

Timeframe	Target Population	Impacted Population	Outcome
In one year	100 high school freshmen ranking in the lowest quartile	75 participating teens	have improved reading skills

Statement: In one year, 75 out of 100 participating high school freshman ranking in the lowest quartile of their class will have improved their reading skills.

Statement:

Statement:

Statement:

Statement:

Statement:

Statement:

Worksheet 2
Developing Long-Term Outcome Statements

In the spaces provided, fill in the time frame, target population, impacted population, and outcome. Then, combine these into a statement. An example is provided.

Timeframe	Target Population	Impacted Population	Outcome
In three year	100 high school freshmen ranking in the lowest quartile	23 participating teens	rank in 2nd quartile of class

Statement: In three years, 25 out of 100 participating teens who were in the lowest quartile at the beginning of the project will rank in the 2nd quartile of their class.

Statement: ______

Statement: ______

Statement: ______

Statement: ______

Statement: ______

Statement: ______

Resources

Publications

Building Villages to Raise Our Children: Evaluation
By P. B. Miller. 1993. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Family Research Project.

The Case for Shifting to Results-based Accountability
Includes a start-up list of outcome measures
By L. B. Schorr. 1993. Washington, D.C.: Improved Outcomes for Children Project and the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

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By L. B. Schorr. 1997. New York: Doubleday.

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D. M. Fetterman, S. J. Kaftarian, and A. Wandersman, editors. 1996. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Evaluating and Reporting Outcomes: A Guide for Respite and Crisis Care Program Managers
By R. Kirk and C. Micklem (In draft): Chapel Hill, N.C.: ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services.

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Annie E. Casey Foundation. 1997. Report, March Research and Evaluation Conference.

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Quarterly. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Family Research Project.

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By H. Chen and P. Rossi. 1980. *Evaluation Review*, 7, 283–302.

Family Support and Education Programs: Working through Ecological Theories of Human Development
By H. Weiss. 1988. In H. Weiss and F. Jacobs (eds.), *Evaluating family programs*. Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine De Gruyter.

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Vol. 16, No. 4. 1998. Chicago, IL: Family Support America.

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Annie E. Casey Foundation. 1995. Report, September Research and Evaluation Conference.

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By N. Ahsan and L. Cramer. 1998. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

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By S. H. Stockdill with M. A. Stoehr. 1998. Golden Valley, Minn.: Saint Paul Foundation, Inc.

Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment
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Learning What Works: Evaluating Complex Social Interventions
Brookings Institution. 1998. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution and Harvard University Project on Effective Interventions.

Making the Case for Family Support
Family Support America. 1996. Chicago, Ill.

Mapping a Path for Evaluation: A Planning Guide
By S. A. Wenzel, and E. Brill. 1998. Chicago, Ill.: Girl's Best Friend Foundation in collaboration with Center for Research on Women and Gender.

Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach
By H. Hatry, et. al. 1996. Alexandria, Va.: United Way of America.

New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods, and Contexts
J. P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L. B. Schorr, and C. H. Weiss, editors. 1995. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute.

Resource Guide to Results-based Accountability Efforts: Profile of Selected States
Results-Based Accountability Project. 1997. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Family Research Project.

Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach
By H. Hatry, et. al. 1996. Alexandria, Va.: United Way of America.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook
Kellogg Foundation. 1998. Battle Creek, Mich.: Kellogg Foundation.

Organizations

American Evaluation Association
PO Box 704
Point Reyes, CA 94956
Phone: 888/311-6321
Fax: (same as phone)
www.eval.org

Harvard Family Research Project
38 Concorde Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: 617/495-9108
Fax: 617/495-8594
gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/index.html

Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute
189 East Chestnut Street
Asheville, NC 28801
Phone: 704/255-0470
Fax: 704/255-9035
Toll-free: 800/824-1182
www.puckett.org

Tufts University Evaluation and Technical Assistance Program
Center for Applied Child Development
177 College Avenue
Medford, MA 02155
Phone: 617/627-3986
Fax: 617/627-3625

On-Line Resources

American Evaluation Association
www.eval.org

Assessment and Evaluation Resources
ericae.net/intass.htm

Evaluation WWW Links
www.socio.com/links/eval_1.htm

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (Kibel's Results Mapping)
www.pire.org

United Way (Outcomes)
www.unitedway.org/outcomes/

Note: A larger list of evaluation web sites can be obtained by sending an e-mail to info@familysupportamerica.org or calling the Family Support America evaluation staff at 312/338-0900.

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Chapter 7

Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement

Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement

By Virginia L. Mason, Executive Director, and Bernice Weissbourd, Founder and Board President, Family Support America

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

Family support has made tremendous advances over the past 25 years. More than 20 states fund state-wide programs; Kentucky alone funds more than 600 Family Resource and Youth Service Centers. Local foundations and city governments are coming together to support city-wide programs in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, and countless other locations. At the federal level, family support has been written into legislation such as the Community-based Family Resource and Support Programs, Empowerment Zones, and Early Head Start.

It is our hope that these developments reflect a growing recognition that promoting the healthy development of children and families is a priority and that as a nation, it is imperative that we consider what is good and bad for them. We look forward to a future in which family support centers are acknowledged as key elements of what makes a community thrive and are universally available. We are committed to creating the type of quality program described in these volumes. In order to reach this goal, individuals, organizations, and government entities everywhere must:

- continue to define and develop our understanding of quality practice in the family support field
- strengthen the communities in which we work
- build a public understanding of the importance of family support and use that understanding to shape national policy for children and families
- move from parent partnerships to parent leadership

The time for family support as a field and as a movement is now. It is time to strengthen the coalition, to unify around common language and structures, and to recognize the power and value of thousands of organizations and programs and millions of families coming together as Family Support America.

Quality Practice in the Family Support Field

One of the lessons that we have learned over the past 25 years is that the family support field knows what works for children and families. In 1996, Family Support America published *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*. This book brought together the best knowledge from more than 2,500 practitioners and parents around the country regarding what it means to practice family support. The resulting principles of family support practice shaped *Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit* as they have shaped everything that Family Support America does. As more and more people and programs become a part of the family support movement, attracted by growing global interest in and increased funding for family support, it is important that we continue to remain faithful to these principles and to what we

know about quality practice. We also must push these principles forward and continually develop our understanding of what they mean for practice in a field that is continually evolving in the face of the changing realities of children and families in our nation. We see a future in which the principles of family support are explicitly woven into the work of every program, agency, and other setting intended to serve children and families across the country. To reach that future, the family support field must:

- operationalize the principles of family support practice, looking at how they apply to all areas of family support practice and to other fields.
- identify outcomes and indicators that are associated with what family support programs do: build the skills and capacities of families and their members. This involves moving away from evaluation models that focus on our ability to prevent low-incidence negative outcomes (child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, etc.) and instead identifying outcomes that are associated with promotion and our ability to achieve what we hope and dream for our children.
- come together to define a learning agenda for the field and identify how we can each contribute to making that learning agenda come alive. What are the areas in which we need further research? How can we more intentionally learn from each other? How can we learn from the commonalties and differences from program to program?
- build our understanding of the needs and strengths of families across the life span—not just those of families that include young children.
- strengthen both pre-service and in-service training and other learning opportunities for those in the family support field.

You can be part of this future by:

- using the principles as a template to shape your planning processes and work
- educating your staff, participants, and community partners about the principles of family support practice
- sharing examples of how you have brought these principles to life in your program
- hosting on-going dialogues about quality family support practice with program staff and parents
- engaging in evaluation activities to monitor the quality and effectiveness of your program on a regular basis; these activities help make the case for continued investment in your program and those like it and help you learn about what the program is doing well and in what ways it needs to change
- providing information on your program

Family Support America is initiating a nationwide project of disseminating and collecting surveys of family support centers. Please contact our headquarters to obtain a survey. The information from these surveys is being used to build a program database that can speak authoritatively about where family support is taking place across the country and about the characteristics of family support programs. The database will connect parents to family support programs in their communities, connect practitioners with each other, and help policymakers to understand the scope and reach of the family support field.

Strengthen Our Communities

Recently, much attention has been paid to the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." In the field of family support, this adage represents a truth that we have known and acted on for many years. We know that just as the healthy development of children is inextricably tied to the health and strength of the families in which they live, the strength and stability of the family is influenced by the community in which its members live. Family support programs work in partnership with a host of community institutions to promote economic well-being, community life, and the overall health of the communities in which they are located. Model programs are engaged in community-building efforts that help to transform communities into not only good places to raise children, but supportive environments for all residents.

While programs have been engaged in community-building work at the local level for a long time, family support, in general, has operated in a sphere separate from that of traditional community development programs.

As a field, we need to:

- build stronger connections to the community development field
- identify model community-building efforts within the family support field
- ensure that community systems of support that are comprehensive, integrated, and easy to access are a central priority of family support
- continue to develop strategies to reach the most isolated families and to connect them to a web of supports within their communities

Your local program can:

- engage parents in civic life by connecting them with the local PTA, neighborhood block club, family support center, or other community entity
- organize activities that improve the physical environment of the community, such as neighborhood clean-ups, neighborhood gardens, and community arts programs
- identify and address community issues as they arise, whether by organizing a neighborhood watch or community policing effort, addressing violence in the community, or advocating for needed services or support
- build strong collaborative relationships with those in your community who provide the formal and informal services on which families depend
- be an active part of community planning and community-building efforts

Build Public Understanding of Family Support to Shape National Policy

The family support field needs to send the message to legislators and other elected officials, public and private funders, and our nation at large that supporting families is essential to our health, our stability, and our future. Sending that message requires that each of us working in our individual communities be the spokesperson for the importance of the family support movement and take part in the national dialogue on family support issues. Making the case for family support is both a moral imperative for our nation and a sound investment in our future. Finally, we need to send the message that family support belongs in every place in which children and families are present, not only in community-based programs and state agencies and human services systems, but also in schools, libraries, health care settings, workplaces, stores, and businesses.

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As a field, we need to:

- create materials that communicate clearly what family support is and why it is important
- use the experiences of our day-to-day family support work to shape a national understanding of how we can best support children and families
- connect to the constellation of movements that care about children and families—the youth development movement, health promotion movement, community development movement, and others are all part of this larger picture
- work to shape our family-serving systems (e.g., health, schools, and social services) so that they are guided by the principles of family support practice and incorporate family support approaches
- create a common family support language and set of symbols—as we grow as a movement, we need to begin to speak with a unified voice and to demonstrate the power of our numbers

Your local program can:

- participate in state-wide and local advocacy coalitions that broaden public support regarding issues that affect children and families
- become a part of your statewide or local family support network
- become a part of Family Support America
- send letters to your congressional representatives about the important work your program is doing and the need for more programs like yours
- serve as a spokesperson for the family support movement in local, state, and national forums
- collaborate with churches, libraries, and other community-based programs to build partnerships that will make family support more widely available to the families in your communities

Move From Parent Partnerships to Parent Leadership

One thing that family support programs have always done well is building partnerships of equality and respect with parents. These partnerships are at the core of family support and of the quality practice described above. We also talk about the important role of programs in developing parent leadership and engaging parents as advocates in their communities and in our society as a whole. Family support recognizes the right and the obligation of parents to engage in leadership. We also know that this is a challenging task. The reality is that most parents have a host of responsibilities on their hands, and adding the tasks involved in being an advocate can be overwhelming. We need to think broadly about parent engagement and build a continuum that begins with involvement and moves toward partnership and leadership, that is responsive to the realities of parents' lives but provides multiple genuine opportunities for parents to be engaged and take leadership at all levels of the family support movement. If we are going to put the issues of children and families on the national agenda, parent leadership is essential, and it cannot be carried out by small group of people who have an abundance of time or skills but must represent a broad spectrum of parents, including those who are currently the least likely to have their voices heard.

As a field, we need to:

- support parent leaders who can help to raise awareness of the importance of issues that affect children and families and participate in decisions about the policies that have impact on their lives
- work with other national organizations to ensure that parents' voices are welcomed and called for at the national, state, and local policy tables at which decisions that affect children and families are made
- raise up the voices of all of the parents in our programs
- find and disseminate information on promising practices and programs in parent engagement

Your local program can:

- give parents leadership roles by creating opportunities for them to shape the direction of your program
- support parents as they take on leadership roles in the community and in other arenas
- provide substantive training for parents on advocacy, policy making, and other issues that will help them to build their leadership skills

Just as the past 25 years have been a period of remarkable growth for family support, so the future is full of promise. It is, perhaps, not dreaming to envision family support centers in every community just as we expect to have libraries, parks, and schools. It is possible to project a time in which the family support center has the characteristics of a community center: that it is a place in which people gather and can make connections; an educational resource from which families learn the best possible way to relate to their children based on an understanding of how children develop; a base at which parents become advocates for family-friendly polices; a forger of connections between parents and whatever they need, whether it's job skills training, ESL classes, or GED preparation; a link in a chain of family support programs in the state, through which parents shape programs and polices that affect their children's lives.

The principles of family support practice could well become the nexus of change for social, health, and education services, and that process is now in its initial stages. The recognition that healthy children, families, and communities are the fundamental building blocks for a strong society calls for a parallel recognition that children, families, and communities need and deserve supports in order to reach their goals. Seeking support is no longer perceived as a sign of weakness, but rather as an indication of the strength to control one's life. No society is built on independence alone. It is only when independent people work together and value their interdependence that good things happen for all.

In developing a family support center, you can become an active player in the family support movement. Together, the family support movement can expand the possibilities of the everyday work that you do and of the community of which you are a part. Our goal is to transform the nation, so that when a public official visits a community, his or her first question is, "How are the children doing?" When that time comes, we will have changed the way America works for families.

As a program developer, you are a vital part of the process. The family support movement, Family Support America, is a coalition and requires active participation of all of its members in their programs, communities, and families. Every voice is important. Every individual makes us stronger. You are an important part of this movement, and all of us at Family Support America look forward to working with you.

For a complete catalog of publications or information on technical assistance and training, contact:

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Family Support Centers

Volume II

Managing Ongoing Operations

A Program Manager's

Toolkit

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Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit—Volume 2: Managing Ongoing Operations

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Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit

Volume 2: Managing Ongoing Operations

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Chapter 8

Staffing Your Center

Family Support Centers

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Staffing Your Center

Staffing is one of the most important decisions for a family support center. Hiring an appropriate staff is critical because the staff, in many cases, will be the program. Staff members personally set the tone for the center, define the relationships with all others that will provide services, and most important, have the most direct contact with families.

Staffing Options

Defining Staff Roles

The staffing configuration of a family support center will be largely dependent on the center's budget and the service components being offered. Typically, however, most centers have at least the following staff positions:

- a supervisor or program director who oversees the general operation of the center
- frontline staff, who may be paid professionals, paraprofessionals, or volunteers
- support staff who perform various administrative and clerical functions

The supervisory staff directs the program, provides staff management and oversight, and keeps all program components operating smoothly. Supervisors or program directors carry out established policies and procedures and oversee the day-to-day management of the program. Their tasks include a variety of administrative and program management functions, including fundraising and budgeting, personnel hiring and staff training, collaboration with other community agencies, marketing and public relations, board development and management, service delivery, and program evaluation. A successful supervisor is also likely to have a reputation as a barrier-breaker, someone who can think creatively about solving problems and resolving disputes in an innovative fashion.

The frontline staff maintains direct and ongoing contact with the program participants. Frontline workers may be either professionals (those with formal training or degrees in a relevant field) or paraprofessionals (those without formal training or a higher education degree). Depending on the resources of the center and the program model being used, workers may be paid or volunteer their time, perhaps with reimbursement for expenses such as travel and childcare.

The specific roles of the frontline staff vary from center to center, but the following represent some common functions performed in most family support centers:

Contacting and Recruiting Participants

Frontline staff members are usually the ones to make initial contact with prospective participants. They explain what the center has to offer, provide reassurances about confidentiality, and describe the potential benefits for the family. Most often it is also frontline staff members who help families through the enrollment or assessment process, if applicable.

Planning and Implementing Activities

Frontline staff, in partnership with families, should plan and carry out activities such as identification of family strengths, needs assessment, development of family goals, problem solving, securing resources, and negotiating with the health and social service system. Depending on the program format, frontline workers may be responsible for making home visits, facilitating group discussions, leading families in a variety of group activities or outings, or caretaking.

In general, family support workers are expected to meet a family's immediate needs and also help them become more self-sufficient over time. In particular, frontline workers at a family support center work to enhance a parent's ability to raise healthy and productive children. At the heart of this task is the building of a trusting relationship between center staff and individual families. Establishing and maintaining this trust is one of the biggest responsibilities of the frontline staff.

Making and Following Up on Referrals

Frontline workers are trained to make referrals for problems that they are not equipped to handle or that go beyond the scope of the services offered at the center. For families with multiple needs, the worker might help prioritize and coordinate needed services. Frontline staff members can also serve in an advocacy role to secure services from other agencies that are responsive and respectful of family needs and individual circumstances.

Documenting and Evaluating Activities

Frontline staff members are usually responsible for documenting the number of families served and the types of services offered. Many centers ask these workers to conduct evaluation interviews and record the progress and results being obtained with families.

The clerical and administrative staff play an important role at a center, as they are often in contact with families as they arrive or call the center. They are responsible for setting the tone and offering first impressions of the center that embody a welcoming family support approach. The essence of the family support philosophy—respect, partnership, and cultural competence—must be presented by all staff members, especially the administrative support staff members who answer the phone and respond to initial general inquiries from families and the community.

Developing a Job Description

Developing a comprehensive job description prompts the center to think carefully about the type of work that is being undertaken and how staff members are meeting the needs of the families being served. In order to begin recruiting staff members, initial job descriptions need to be developed. Once a staff member has been recruited, interviewed, and hired, job descriptions can be fine-tuned in partnership with the new employee to solicit ideas on how best to utilize his or her skills, strengths, and experiences in satisfying the job description. It is often recommended that the job description be finalized after an initial probationary period so that the employee has had time to experience the job.

Roles and Responsibilities of Key Staff Positions

Position	Duties
Home visitor/parent educator	Teach parenting skills.
	Engage in developmentally appropriate activities with the children.
	Encourage parents to identify and meet their goals.
Preschool teacher	Prepare children for school through developmentally appropriate play and a child-based learning philosophy.
Early childhood specialist	Train and supervise home visitors.
	Develop early childhood curriculum.
Social workers/family liaison	Serve as advocates for families who need services from other agencies. Help parents find health care, day care, adult education, housing, employment, and other needed services.
	Mediate conflicts and maintain open communication between participating families and outside agencies.
Adult education teacher	Offer GED, computer literacy, and other classes.
	Help parents register for classes at local colleges.
	Prepare parents to enter local job market.
Nurse practitioner	Offer on-site basic health care, including immunizations, health care information, and counseling.
Program director	Oversee the entire program, including collaborative partnerships, budget, funding, staff, and training.

Lopez and Hochberg 1993

When developing a job description, it is helpful to include the following information:

- organizational description and goals
- qualifications sought
- responsibilities
- contact information
- hiring timeline
- materials needed from an applicant (e.g., résumé, writing sample, professional references)

A sample job description for a family support worker is included at the end of this chapter.

Recruiting

When the center is preparing to hire, it should develop a recruitment plan. There are many potential family support center workers in any community; the challenge is how to find them and interest them in becoming part of the program. To this end, the center must decide whether to focus recruitment efforts within a limited geographical area or whether to cast a wider net in hopes of increasing both the diversity and number of applicants. The following table outlines the advantages and disadvantages of different staff recruitment strategies (Epstein, Larner, and Halpern 1995, 145):

Recruitment Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
TARGETED: Focused on a particular community and/or type of individual	• Interests and qualifications of workers are more likely to match those of the program. • The program can recruit both family workers and potential participants from the same target area. • The program will find it easier to identify "natural helpers" from within the community. • The program can establish an ongoing source of potential staff in the event of turnover or expansion.	• The number of potential applicants may be limited by ignoring other neighborhoods or overlooking populations eager to contribute their talents. • The diversity of potential applicants may be limited, limiting the program's ability to match workers with family needs. • Staff members may overidentify with family problems and not be effective at separating their personal experience from those of the participating families. • Workers may not attain legitimacy as qualified helpers in the eyes of family members.
BROAD-BASED: Aimed at a wide range of geographical areas and/or types of individuals	• Increases the number and diversity of potential applicants. • May turn up workers who at first seem unqualified but prove to be surprisingly effective. • Publicizes the program to a broad range of potential clients.	• Attracts a larger number of inappropriate applicants. • Screening applications can be very time consuming. • Program will be less likely to repeat a broad-based recruitment effort for staff replacement or expansion.

Interviewing

The intensity and format of interviewing varies from center to center. The main objective of the interview is to simply get to know the potential staff member better and to assess where he or she might best fit in. Below are some basic questions and information that should be obtained in a staff interview.

- What is the person's motivation for working at the family support center?
- What personal or professional goals does he or she hope to accomplish through this work?
- What are his or her strengths and weaknesses?
- What is his or her relevant past experience working with children and families?
- What types of projects/activities/programs would he or she like to work on?
- What keeps this person motivated and what does he or she need or look for in supervision?

Interviews of potential staff members who will have direct contact with children and families should provide information beyond the basics listed above. It is critical to ascertain whether the person has personal characteristics such as maturity, warmth, good judgment, interpersonal skills, and the ability to form relationships easily. It is important in the interviewing process to determine a person's comfort level with working with families from a variety of cultural backgrounds. It is also important to ascertain his or her ability to think quickly and handle situations such as intoxication or domestic violence.

Ask about and check up on the criminal background of any staff member who will come into contact with young children at the center, as well as about any child abuse complaints filed against the applicant. If necessary, make sure the candidate can meet state licensing requirements. If the person will be transporting family members, the driving record will also need to be checked. Finally, ask for at least three references and check them diligently.

Hiring

Multiple criteria should be used when hiring staff members. Do not be afraid to hire people based more on their personal qualities than on the experience listed on their résumés. Take the time to explore a candidate's attitude toward children and families, willingness to work flexibly, commitment to the family support approach, and ability to work as part of a team.

The number of people to hire depends on the size and goals of the center. Most centers hire a core social service staff to ensure that the basic services are provided and to coordinate with other community services. Regardless of how many people are hired, all staff members should possess the capacity for building strong interpersonal relationships. A second important characteristic for all staff members to have is experience working with the families and children in the community in which the center is located.

Hiring Former Participants

Some programs are specifically designed to encourage participants to join the staff. Others find themselves evolving into this practice as a natural consequence of the center's success with families and the recipients' desire to give something back. An advantage of hiring former participants is that they bring to the position an immediate understanding of what the center is all about. They bring an intimate understanding of the common needs of families, having been there themselves, and also of strategies that they have personally found effective. From the center's perspective, moving participants into staff roles contributes to their development as leaders and increases their capacities, skills, and self-confidence. Lastly, these parents can serve as positive role models for other families.

A disadvantage of hiring former participants is that their earlier history and their newly achieved staff status can hinder them. Participating families may not be convinced that these workers have advanced enough to be giving help and advice to others. There is also the danger of former participants being too eager to disperse advice and give directions. As family support centers deliberately offer environments in which there are no authority figures telling parents what to do, having a family worker assume this role undermines family support principles. Again, the degree to which a center wants to pursue this staffing option is an individual consideration. However, caution should be exercised, and resources need to be allocated to ensure proper supervision and training for all staff members. See chapter 13 on family involvement and leadership for more ideas on how to integrate families into staff roles.

Using Volunteers

With budget cuts and the ever-present struggle to make ends meet, using volunteers is often a necessity. Besides offering financial advantages, using volunteers empowers the local community and adds credibility to the family support center. However, it is imperative to have a clear sense of the center's needs and resources and to be prepared for intense planning and careful management when working with volunteers. Increasingly, volunteers are looking for a rewarding and structured experience. They may not be willing to perform menial, poorly planned tasks. Therefore, if one wants to ensure volunteers' satisfaction and the program's success, one needs to treat volunteers professionally, to treat their duties as important, to do some careful planning, and to provide plenty of supervision.

Why Do People Volunteer?

The reasons that people volunteer are as various as the people themselves. No two volunteers have exactly the same motivation or the same set of goals and expectations, and this is probably one of the most exciting aspects of working with volunteers. Some of the most common reasons that people volunteer are

- to make a contribution
- to express values
- to socialize and remain connected
- to increase job skills and climb the "career ladder"

Although the volunteer program cannot meet every need of every volunteer, it is important to try to do just that. Part of the volunteer interview should be to ask the applicant why he or she wants to volunteer and what he or she hopes to get out of the experience. One can make the volunteer program more successful by listening to the volunteers' needs, desires, and motivation for serving and then responding by giving them tasks and projects that are harmonious with those motivations.

Recruiting Volunteers

A vital aspect of successful outreach and recruitment is knowing where to look. Potential volunteers are everywhere, but if they are not informed about the family support center and the opportunities available, how can they help? The following are six valuable sources of volunteers: (1) parents and program participants; (2) community residents; (3) the corporate sector; (4) high schools, community colleges, and universities; (5) senior citizen/retirement groups; and (6) civic and professional groups and churches. But do not feel limited to these sources. Be creative when looking for volunteers, and do not hesitate to try new avenues.

- **Parents and program participants:** In order to reach parents, one might need to conduct intensive door-to-door recruiting and in-home visits, talking to parents, letting them know what is available at the center, and encouraging them to stop by. Make it clear that their feedback is wanted, and welcome their opinions on matters pertaining to the community and the center. Asking for parents' advice and actively listening to them is an expression of sincerity and will make the center more credible in their eyes. As credibility and trust grow, parents are more likely to become active and to feel comfortable volunteering. Offer tangible incentives to parents such as baby supplies, food, transportation, and free childcare.

- **Community residents:** Obtaining volunteers from the local community is extremely important. Even if the center is financed and supported by the state or federal government, if the local community does not support it, it probably will not thrive. Utilizing volunteers from the local community increases the center's credibility by building a sense of trust. Through volunteering, people from the community become familiar with the center and the services offered and convinced of the center's sincere desire to serve. Consequently, these volunteers will be more likely to refer friends and neighbors who need assistance.

- **The corporate community:** Many companies in the corporate sector are starting to encourage their employees to serve the local community through volunteer work. This pool of volunteers could be a great asset to the center not only because of their professional expertise, but also because of their access to community resources. Companies with volunteer programs establish a respected image, as employees and members of the community like to see a company that is concerned about more than its bottom line.

- **High schools, community colleges, and universities:** High school, undergraduate, and graduate students often have to meet volunteer requirements and therefore may be seeking a place in which to serve. High school students may belong to clubs or organizations that require community service. There is an increasing trend for high schools to require students to perform community service as a prerequisite for graduation. Some students are interested in volunteering as a means of gaining marketable skills that can help them with future careers.

  Principals, assistant principals, deans, and guidance counselors from local area high schools and colleges can serve as liaisons to link the center with potential student volunteers. Contact academic departments such as social work, sociology, psychology, elementary education, and special education for more information on student interns. Other students volunteer because of their involvement in a civic or philanthropic organization, to expose themselves to different careers, or simply because they want to. To connect with these students, try contacting the office of student affairs, the office of student activities, the office of student leadership, the panhellenic office, or the campus ministry center.

- **Senior citizen and retirement groups:** Older adults are a great source of volunteers. Not only do they often have professional skills from their working experience, but they also have life skills. It is important to be aware of age-related limitations when working with older adults. However, as health care, technology, and life expectancies increase, 65 is less often seen as "old age." Volunteering can also give older adults an increased sense of self-worth and self-esteem and help them stay connected to their communities. Contact local retirement communities as well as organizations such as the Corporation for National Service (CNS). CNS has a senior service corps that helps place people 55 and older in volunteer opportunities related to their interests. Their web site is at www.cns.gov, and they can be reached at 800/424-8867 for more information.

- **Civic groups, professional groups, and churches:** Many communities have active chapters of groups such as the Lion's Club, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Jaycees, and PTA. These groups, as well as professional groups and associations, are potential sources of volunteers. It is also a good idea to establish a rapport with community churches. Many churches have active members who seek opportunities to volunteer.

Male Staff Members

Having men on staff at the center, either paid or as volunteers, is important and can have a significant impact on young children's lives by providing stable role models where few might exist. Male staff members also increase the center's ability to attract male participants.

It is widely acknowledged, however, that it is difficult to recruit and retain male staff members at family support centers. In 1989, only five percent of the people employed in childcare were men, mostly because of the low salaries associated with this profession. Family support centers that have been successful in recruiting and retaining male staff members cite the following recruitment strategies: local newspaper advertisements; announcements in local college placement offices; flyers in local school districts, health facilities, and local businesses; and word-of-mouth advertising.

Professional versus Paraprofessional Staff

The choice of staffing a family support center with professionals or with paraprofessionals is an ongoing debate in the field. The trend in the past 30 years has been toward the increased use of paraprofessionals from the local community. Reasons for this trend include the fact that paraprofessionals, with their close ties to the community and similar life experiences, are often able to establish a better level of trust and rapport than are professionals from outside the community. Employing paraprofessionals from the local community also serves as an economic investment in jobs and provides career development options that are much needed in many communities. Recent studies, however, have found that well-trained professionals are also needed to effectively serve families that face multiple and complex issues.

The advantage of employing paraprofessionals from the community is that they are more likely and able to establish credibility and trust with families based on their experience with some of the same problems, cultural issues, language, and values. A paraprofessional who has overcome some of the

Male Involvement

Project Manpower, initiated at a Head Start program in Dayton, Ohio, encouraged local men to volunteer in the Head Start classroom. By working with local businesses and professional and church groups, the program recruited men and provided information on specific activities and roles they could assist with, such as reading a story, assisting with computer operations, talking with children about their work, or organizing a sports event. As a result, the program now has a roster of over 25 male professionals who have signed up to volunteer their time, including bankers and lawyers. One man who volunteered with the program stated, "This has allowed me to work with youngsters—to get involved in the lives of kids before they become at-risk." This man was so impressed with what he saw in the classroom that he went on to hold a number of policymaking positions in the local and national Head Start program.

same circumstances faced by program participants can offer unique empathy and hope. Such workers can be a real inspiration and positive role model for families as they struggle with issues.

The disadvantage of using paraprofessionals is that parents may feel that a peer from the community cannot be an expert source of wisdom or knowledge. Parents may think that only a professional can offer the kind of support and advice that will help. Another dynamic that sometimes occurs is that paraprofessionals, armed with newly acquired knowledge and authority, can come across as more overbearing than professionals who are more secure and comfortable with their knowledge, skills, and status.

Professionals might offer a level of knowledge and skill development that goes beyond the scope of the skills and in-service training available to paraprofessionals. Some studies have pointed out that when the costs of in-service training and supervision are calculated for paraprofessionals, the cost differential between lay workers and professional staff members is not that great. Centers may hope to save resources by hiring paraprofessionals, but those savings are often not realized because of the training and supervision costs associated with a paraprofessional staffing arrangement (Harkavy and Bond 1992).

Each center must decide for itself which staffing configuration to pursue. For most centers, a mix of professional and paraprofessionals works best. Both professionals and paraprofessionals can establish a trusting and open relationship with families. The key is having a staff that respects the strengths of families, listens attentively to their concerns, and helps them achieve their goals in an empowering and capacity-building manner. In summary, personal qualities may be more important than education and experience as factors that determine who will be an effective frontline worker.

How Our Center Does It

Vaughn Family Center

San Fernando, California

Vaughn Family Center is multicultural and was founded in 1990 as a school-based family support center. It is located in a community in which 80 percent of the people are Latino, 12 percent are African American, and the rest are white and Asian. Virtually all of the staff at Vaughn are paraprofessionals who are full-time paid employees. There are five paraprofessionals, four of whom are "family advocates." These advocates conduct home visits and serve families who come to Vaughn on drop-in basis, linking individuals and families with a wide range of services in the community.

There are six community liaisons, parents working part-time in support of the school and the Vaughn Family Center. Community liaisons and family advocates work on a project known as "FamilyCare." This is a customer-driven program for restructuring the delivery of health and human services for children and families. FamilyCare is collaboration between LA Unified School District, United Way of North Angeles Region, and the Los Angeles Educational Partnership. In essence, the Vaughn FamilyCare site is a one-stop family center providing a neighborhood-based single point of access to integrated and comprehensive children and family services. Vaugn's FamilyCare hopes to serve as a model for urban schools.

Staff Development and Training

Staff members in family support centers are the "front line" in translating family support principles into action. To be sure that this translation occurs, family support centers must hire people who understand the basic principles of family support, and they must also provide training and staff development opportunities so that the natural abilities and knowledge of staff members are enhanced and strengthened. The goal is to enable the staff to model family support principles with participants and build trusting relationships with families that may be skeptical and wary of "helping organizations." Often, family support training programs include retraining, building of new knowledge and skills, and opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth.

Why Training Is Important

The provision of high-quality training is critical to the success and effectiveness of a family support center. Training and staff development opportunities are a good way to build staff expertise and convey to staff members that they are valued and appreciated. A good training program also reduces staff turnover. This is important because high staff turnover has been linked to poor-quality care and poor developmental outcomes for children. On the other hand, staff members who have training in child development and higher educational levels have been linked to better-quality care and better outcomes for children. (Helpurn and Howes 1996; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990)

There are inherent challenges in training staff members to work appropriately in family support centers. Few arrive knowing how to balance the mix of nonprofessional responsibilities with the sensitive demands of professional level issues such as confidentiality and boundary setting. The training program of the center must help staff members (both professional and paraprofessional) be flexible, nonjudgmental, partnership-oriented, strengths-based, and understand the neighborhood and cultural context of the families coming into the center. Below are some of the reasons for investing in a solid and comprehensive training program.

Filling in Knowledge Gaps

Just as family support centers value diversity in their participants, they also value diversity in their staff. As a result, staff members come to family support centers from all different walks of life. Some are parents who have participated in programs, some hold advanced professional degrees such as masters of social work (MSW), some have come from other professions (such as nursing, teaching, childcare, human development, or business), and still others are volunteers from the community. Because they have come from diverse backgrounds, they need to supplement both their formal learning (what they *know*) and their practice capabilities (what they *do*). Training allows programs to get all staff members on the same page regarding their knowledge of the community and family support values, and gives them a common set of tools with which they can work.

Modeling Family-Supportive Practice

Training presents a wonderful opportunity for the trainer and the center to model family-supportive practices to new and veteran members of the staff. Family-supportive goals for training include

- reaching maximum *collaboration* between staff members, so that the training sessions are relevant to all and meet individual staff members' needs
- providing *continuity of training* for staff so that, like program participants, they do not have to jump through hoops to connect individual pieces of learning
- supporting and recognizing the *system* in which the staff are operating by acknowledging constraints that keep staff members from being able to participate, and asking them what training is most relevant for their work
- building the *skill and capacity* of family support workers
- providing *peer support* opportunities for staff members and participants.
- respecting and learning about staff members' *culture*
- providing opportunities for staff members to *serve as resources* to each other
- *empowering* staff members and modeling of the kind of relationships desired between staff and participants

Updating Staff on New Issues

Family support centers and other human service organizations deal with social policy issues concerning the rights of certain populations or communities. As such, it is imperative that the staff be kept up-to-date on legislative and social policy issues that affect their practice, the families, and the communities they serve. Beyond social policy considerations, staff should also be aware of innovations in the field, including the results of important research. Training may focus on

- proposed or new legislation
- changes in eligibility for government programs
- new research on brain development, home visiting models, or promising practices
- public health issues (such as vaccinations, protocols for working with children with TB, HIV, or Hepatitis B)
- emerging community issues

Investing In and Validating Staff

Family support centers should be aware that just as program participants are sensitive to subtle messages sent by the center's actions and staff interactions, investing in training sends psychological messages to staff members. By applying often scarce resources toward staff development, the center conveys that the staff is valued.

In addition, by investing in their skills, the organization also acknowledges that staff members are a crucial part of the center's success. While working in family support settings is very rewarding, it can also be stressful and frustrating at times. By giving staff members opportunities to develop personally and professionally, the center builds morale and excitement. Training gives staff members time to think about what it is they do on an everyday basis and remain inspired about their work. Training also helps reduce turnover and encourages staff members to serve as resources to each other.

General Principles in Training Design

Family support centers should keep the following principles in mind when designing their training services. (Norton 1994)

Flexibility and Continuity

Just as family support centers seek to integrate services and empower program participants, they should seek to have a holistic, developmental approach to staff training. Rather than taking place once, training should include a core curriculum and link to other related themes over time. Also, the training curriculum should remain responsive to feedback by program and training participants.

Recognition of Experience Levels

For staff development and training to be helpful, the gaps in staff members experience, knowledge, and skills must be recognized. So must their strengths, so that their expertise may be called upon. For example, a paraprofessional from the community may have experience in negotiating with the local social service and government agencies, and therefore can be a resource for training people new to the area. A program participant can be helpful as a consultant on home visiting training. Those with formal educational backgrounds may be of use in child development training or in ethics and professional standards training. A member from the community can be useful in helping staff members understand families' cultural issues, values, and norms as they relate to child rearing.

Incorporation of Staff and Parental Input

To truly reflect the center goals, training should be based on suggestions from frontline staff members, parents, and administrative staff. Since training contributes to both individual and organizational development, seeking input from all parties involved in the organization is consistent with the family support values of empowerment and collaboration. Often, administrative staff members who answer the phone can point out trends in the questions asked. Parents are often able to point out areas in which the staff needs more training. Staff members, when asked, are generally very astute about the areas in which they need the most growth.

Building on Staff Competencies

Staff training should build on existing talents and skills and offer sequential opportunities to master core competencies. Staff members should be allowed to assess their own strengths and contribute to their own individual staff development plans. This type of strengths- and competency-based training can build staff morale and model the relationships staff members will be expected to have with program participants.

Use of Hands-on Learning Opportunities

Staff members need training that is implemented in a practical manner within family support centers. Providing opportunities for hands-on experience brings abstract or theoretical concepts and practices down to earth and helps staff members integrate concepts and information. For example, when discussing early childhood development, give examples of the kinds of motor skills a two-year-old may possess, and then encourage staff members to look for those skills in their interactions with two-year-olds. Use different teaching styles, such as role-playing, video presentations, lectures, and small group activities. Using multiple approaches prevents monotony in training sessions and better addresses different learning styles.

Responsiveness to and Respect for Culture

Hiring trainers who speak staff members' language (or having an interpreter present), using curricula that are in trainees' language, being responsive to interpersonal styles that have their roots in culture, and not scheduling training sessions on holidays or other days that staff members may not be available because of their cultures all combine to help the training program be responsive to the language and the cultures of staff members.

Organizational Support

Family support personnel often are asked to be many places at once, performing many roles and actions. Overextended staff members will not be receptive to training if it means that they will have even less time to perform their regular duties. Giving staff members time off for training, or lessening their work load during training sessions, helps lighten the burden and increase their receptiveness to training. When possible, arrange to have substitute or replacement staff.

Training Topics

Family support center staff members need a broad range of skills and a body of knowledge to work effectively with families. It is the responsibility of the family support center to make sure that all employees receive the training and supervision they need. Orientation and training should be provided to all staff before they meet with their first families. Early home visits and initial center-based classes should be supervised in order to provide on-the-job feedback and suggestions. Regular in-service training should be provided as indicated by staff requests. Below are lists of skills and knowledge areas that are required for all family support center staff members:

Knowledge Areas

Developing a common knowledge base provides staff members with the concepts, theories, values, and information that are the foundation of family support practice. Ensuring a common knowledge base ensures that everyone is "on the same page" philosophically and that one staff member's actions will not contradict another's. It also requires having common practices and procedures to ensure participants receive attention that is both responsive to their individual needs and reflective of family support principles. Finally, all staff members must have equal access to referral resources so that maximum quality and equality may be accomplished. The following are areas of knowledge in which the center must keep staff informed and trained:

- family support principles and philosophies
- the center and its history, personnel policies, and expectations
- the center's programs and services
- infusion of family support principles into all aspects of the center, including planning, governance, administration, and evaluation
- the local community, local resources, and referral procedures
- child and family development
- adult learning and development
- cultural responsiveness
- opportunities for involvement of parent leaders
- laws and policies on confidentiality, mandated reporting, and use of staff time

- staff performance issues: record keeping, teamwork, program accountability, evaluation, supervision, and relating to volunteers

Skills

The level of skill that staff members bring to a family support center vary according to personal attributes and previous experience. Developing staff skills and competencies involves translating and applying the above knowledge areas and family support philosophical guidelines into everyday practice. Listed below are some common skills needed by all family support center staff members (Hochberg 1995; Family Support America 1991):

1. **Communication Skills**
    - trust building
    - empathetic listening
    - rapport building
    - respect for diversity in culture and lifestyle
    - acceptance
    - creative confrontation
    - advocacy
    - humor
    - termination
    - documentation

2. **Problem-Solving Skills**
    - assessment
    - diagnosis
    - goal setting
    - discipline
    - conflict resolution
    - collaboration
    - evaluation
    - safety promotion
    - situation management
    - negotiation
    - time management

3. **Interpersonal Skills**
    - respect
    - patience and persistence
    - mentoring and coaching
    - appreciation and affirmation
    - empathy and warmth
    - openness and flexibility
    - optimism and a sense of realism
    - understanding multiple perspectives
    - good judgment and boundary setting
    - sharing power with families
    - working across cultures

For some members of the family support center staff, there is also a set of more specialized skills that must be obtained. These skills are more specific to a higher level of interaction with participant family members. They pertain to family development, group facilitation, working with adolescents, facilitating parent/child activities, early childhood education and childcare, counseling, crisis management, leadership development, and home visiting. For more discussion of some of these skill areas, see chapters 3 and 4.

Training Strategies

Many different methods are available for training family support personnel. The model chosen depends in large part on (1) the context, (2) the experience and education level of the trainees, and (3) the resources (financial, human, and time) dedicated to the training.

Training can be done as a group or in individual situations, it can be done in collaboration with other providers or allies, and it can tap into statewide or national resources. Below are descriptions of different approaches, along with their benefits and possible difficulties (Hochberg 1995; Family Support America 1996):

Group Training at the Center

- **Team teaching:** Multiple staff members with expertise in a training area share materials and design ways of practicing skills.

  This method has the benefit of modeling the family support principle of egalitarian relationships, and it helps draw out the skills of staff. It is good to use when one is aware of in-house expertise and when a less structured presentation of material is possible.

  Possible challenges: May establish staff hierarchies; be careful to draw on the expertise of all staff members at some time if this method is used.

- **Pairing staff:** Team a less experienced staff member with one who has expertise in a given area.

  This method allows one to draw on the expertise of the existing staff and to develop staff relationships. It also presents staff members with more than one contact person to whom they may go with questions. Pairing is good to use when the material presented (including administrative procedures and practice methods) is hands-on.

  Possible challenges: May establish staff hierarchies; be careful to draw on the expertise of all staff members at some time if this method is used.

- **Hiring a consultant or trainer:** Hire a professional with expertise in a given area.

  This method is a good alternative if there are no "experts" on your staff or when an issue or topic (e.g., substance abuse issues or public health concerns) requires an expert professional to teach it. This might involve inviting a lecturer in from a local college to train the center staff.

  Possible challenges: This alternative may be expensive compared to other possible knowledge sources. See whether the consultant will donate his or her services or perhaps give a discounted price.

Off-Site Training

- **Cross-agency training:** Collaborate with another local agency to design and implement training.

  This method helps keep staff members updated on family issues and systems issues (e.g., child welfare or TANF), and allows the center to develop a closer collaborative relationship with the collaborating agency.

  Possible challenges: As with any collaborative effort, cross-agency training requires careful planning and implementation. Making sure that goals are similar, and that both agencies' needs are being met, will help ensure successful collaboration.

- **Collaborating with statewide networks of family support programs:** Work with the networks in your state.

  This method has the advantage of linking programs with others that are ideologically and philosophically compatible with the family support approach, responsive to state issues and concerns, and able to share resources.

  Possible challenges: Collaborative efforts require careful planning and implementation; also, cost constraints and travel time could be factors.

- **Collaborating with membership organizations, state agencies, or public systems:** Work with national organizations (e.g., Family Support America), state agencies (e.g., your state's Department of Child and Family Services), or national agencies (e.g., the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

  The benefit of using this training arrangement is that larger organizations such as state agencies are more likely have power, influence, and insight at larger system levels, and they may have more information on certain governmental regulations. Collaborating with governmental organizations allows centers to gain a broader perspective on participant rights in those systems or on the latest regulations in those systems. Membership organizations can offer a small family support center a larger perspective on frontline practice, advocacy, and public policy.

Using National Resource Centers

You can use national resource centers to access technical assistance and training under federal grant programs.

With the reauthorization of federal legislation pertaining to family support services, funds were made available to establish national resource centers that provide free technical assistance and training to states to help them implement family support programming. If your center receives funding under either the federal Community-based Family Resource and Support Program or Promoting Safe and Stable Families program, contact your lead state agency to access technical assistance from two national resource centers, the National Resource Center for Community-based Family Resource and Support Programs (CBFRS) and the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. Refer to Family Support America's web site at www.familysupportamerica.org to link to these two resource centers.

Possible challenges: This type of training can require more careful planning and implementation than others because different viewpoints and organizational cultures come into contact with each other. Be sure that philosophies are compatible and that the training offered by these institutions will be useful to staff members in their service setting.

- **Attending conferences:** Make funds available for staff to attend conferences.

  This method could have enormous payoffs in boosting staff morale and excitement, keeping staff members informed about current research and issues, and encouraging them to network with other professionals and programs in the field.

  Possible challenges: This strategy is costly, and it may be difficult to cover a staff person's time while he or she is away.

- **Attending classes at a local college or training center:** Pay the tuition for staff members to attend relevant classes.

  This strategy helps orient staff members to a resource in their community. Taking classes with others not employed at the center also allows staff members to encounter different perspectives on training issues. Investing in one staff member in this way makes him or her a future knowledge source for other staff members.

  Possible challenges: Be careful to give equal access to all staff members and have staff members participate in decisions about who will attend the class. Cost constraints must also be considered.

Individual Training

- **Personal reflection exercises:** Give staff "time out" to think about their opinions and practices.

  It is a helpful strategy to ensure that staff members are given time to explore their own backgrounds and reactions before they become habitual and automatic.
  Emotional responses may also be processed before they become part of the often hectic everyday operations of the center. This is a good method to use when the training material presented has value-laden elements and when it involves direct-practice issues.

  Possible challenges: Staff members may be reluctant to present dissenting views about value-laden material; be sure that the environment for personal reflection is safe, nonjudgmental, and confidential.

- **Time to research on the Internet:** Give staff periodic blocks of time to gather and review information from the World Wide Web.

  If the center is connected to the Internet, this can be an invaluable resource for your staff. Different Web sites contain up-to-date information on current policy issues, national resource organizations, trends and statistics on specific populations, and technical assistance. After one staff member has had time to do research, he or she can present the findings to other staff members. Thus, learning is deepened through (1) the opportunity to teach and (2) the opportunity to learn from other staff members.

Possible challenges: It may seem inefficient and too costly to take staff time away from direct services and tasks. Also, providing computer time to all staff members in an egalitarian manner could prove challenging. Overcoming some training participants' fear and lack of knowledge regarding information technology might also be time-consuming.

- **Self-development:** Provide opportunities for staff members to work on self-development and personal growth.

  Providing opportunities for staff members to explore the following areas can help maintain their motivation and ability to work effectively with families: professional boundaries, personal limitations, self-disclosure skills, integrity, professional development, self-direction, flexibility, self-care, safety, and personal satisfaction.

  Possible challenges: It may be difficult to set boundaries on what kinds of self-development training qualify. The staff might want to include a broader range of personal growth topics than is financially feasible for the center to cover.

Training Volunteers

Volunteer training should be a major component of any institution that utilizes volunteers. An effective training program ensures that volunteers understand their duties and will perform them to center standards. Since volunteers are mostly part-time, providing training can shorten the time that it takes for them to become familiar with their work. Training gives volunteers increased confidence in performing their duties. When volunteers are confused and uncertain about what is expected of them, they are more likely to leave the center and volunteer their time elsewhere. Inadequate or minimal training is a costly management mistake, which is why some of the best nonprofits invest liberally in training and supervising volunteers.

Consideration should be given to what volunteers should know and be able to do, as well as the attitudes and perspectives that are essential for being able to do those jobs. Of course the necessary knowledge and skills vary greatly depending on the services offered at the center and the type of volunteer, but here is a general list of topics with which all volunteers should be familiar:

- the specifics of the job and who to go to with questions
- the center's mission, philosophy, history, and organizational structure
- the center's programs
- who uses the center; the culture of the families being served; the needs, issues, and circumstances that typically bring families to seek involvement or help
- the specific skills needed to work with families
- the types of interaction and boundary setting necessary between volunteers and families and between volunteers and staff members
- the services the staff provides to families and the administrative functions that keep the center going
- the relationships that exist between the center and other service providers in the community
- the center's decision-making processes

There are also certain attitudes and perspectives with which volunteers should be familiar. This is not meant to imply that everyone should think alike, because there is a definite advantage and need for diverse opinions and points of view. However, a few perspectives are essential to the center's family support mission and therefore require a degree of common understanding. For example, part of the function of a volunteer training program is to ensure that all volunteers model and understand family support principles. These principles are the basis of your family support center, and volunteers need to have a comprehensive understanding of them.

Another area in which all volunteers should be trained, regardless of their specific duties, is confidentiality. Explain why it is important and what it means to keep something confidential. As parents participating in the program will often volunteer some of their time, there is a need to clarify for them the difference between being a program participant and a volunteer. The roles are different, and this discussion will require some focused attention.

Finally, if time and resources are available, you may consider training your volunteers in CPR, first aid, or basic precautionary safety measures. This training could be especially valuable if the volunteer is going to be working closely with children. Keep in mind that you may be able to collaborate with the local Red Cross and come up with creative, mutually beneficial ways to obtain volunteer training.

Volunteering is often a very good first step toward future employment at the center or another community organization. It is important to build in mechanisms for volunteer recognition, such as events, certificates in newsletters, or announcements in local newspapers. Volunteer hours can also be translated into other benefits, such as reduced registration fees for special events or conferences.

Training Curricula

Training curricula (trainers' guides, workbooks, handouts, overheads) can be useful tools for family support centers in a number of ways. First, these predesigned programs save development time. Companies or organizations that put together training packages have gone through a process of testing the material already at numerous sites. Second, some packages are designed to be taught over time and are nearly comprehensive in their scope, allowing a practitioner or administrator more time to concentrate on other organizational demands. Third, some training materials accompany different credentialing programs, so teaching your staff from those materials may give them an edge in the credentialing process. Fourth, training materials are often developed as a collaborative effort between institutions of higher learning, government and national organizations, state agencies, and local programs. As such, the knowledge put forth in those tools represents the cumulative knowledge of those groups.

Choosing the Right Curriculum for the Center

When investing in materials for your training program, there are a number of questions that must be asked to ensure that the curriculum chosen is the most useful and appropriate.

1. **How is language used in the materials?** The way language is used in a training program reflects the curriculum's underlying values. It is important to start with materials that use family-supportive language and are family-focused, culturally competent, and offered in the primary language of the people who will be trained.

2. **Which staff members do you wish to train using these materials?** Some materials are designed for application to a broad array of audiences with varying educational backgrounds and reading levels, while others are geared to a specific audience (e.g., childcare workers, parent educators). Consideration must be given to the intended audience when selecting training materials.

3. **How specific do you want the information provided to be?** Some training materials provide general knowledge and competency training, while others focus on particular subject areas. One must assess whether the curriculum needs to be general or specialized.

4. **Is the material presented sequentially or in modules?** Some training materials are designed so that knowledge is sequential and cumulative, and the exercises build on what has come before. Others are organized so that one section can be used independently, depending on need and interest. If you want to access different modules of the curriculum in a nonsequential order, the ease with which this can be done must be a consideration.

5. **What modes of learning are suggested and practiced in the curriculum?** A family support center should be responsive to varying learning styles. As such, the curriculum should present material in various ways or should be adaptable to different learning modes, such as individual study, internships, small group discussions, and so on.

6. **Does your state have a credentialing program for family support workers?** If so, reviewing the credentialing materials would be a good starting point in helping workers gain skills that are recognized throughout the field.

7. **Are the materials competency-based?** Competency-based curricula provide pre- and post-training measures, so that staff can document their progress in acquiring new skills and knowledge. These measures also help trainers identify competency areas that need further attention and match staff members with strengths in one area to those needing assistance and further development in that area.

Adapting the Training Materials

Rarely will one set of materials prove suitable for all training needs. Practitioners in the field often splice training materials or take specific chapters/modules from different sources—such as other local social service agencies and family support centers, the local public library, and national training centers—to piece together the training that is most responsive to local and individual needs. This way, the trainer is able to integrate (for example) family support principles—a more universal training topic—with how to access and navigate the local social service system. Training in this sense becomes a collaborative quilt of topics that adapts specific materials to local needs while remaining true to broader family support themes and knowledge.

Sometimes it is necessary to change the period of time over which the materials are presented. While most training materials come with a suggested time frame, many take for granted the ability of trainees to block off a whole week for training. When this is not possible, trainers may need to offer the materials over a longer period. The center should consult with others who have experience in this training regarding what a good timeline would be, so that (1) not too much is lost between sessions and (2) trainees have adequate time to absorb what they have learned and still fulfill their other obligations. Also, it is suggested that the trainer consult with others who have received this training in the past to learn from their experiences.

Supervision

Supporting and supervising staff members throughout their tenure at the family support center is important for a number of reasons. Investing in them, first of all, is consistent with family support principles and philosophy. Offering a good training program and quality supervision demonstrates respect for the staff, for program participants, for the center, and for the community. Staff members may be more eager to take a job at a family support center if it represents a chance for personal improvement or career advancement, coupled with a supportive, supervised, and family-friendly work environment. Second, supporting the staff improves the quality of services that are available to participants. Third, with improved program quality comes increased effectiveness, which can affect the growth of the family support center both in terms of its funding and programming and in terms of its impact in the community.

A family support center is only as effective as its staff's ability to carry out the mission and work according to family support principles. Good supervision enables staff to keep the center's goals, their own job responsibilities, and their own growth and development at the forefront of all interactions and stay grounded in the family support approach.

Supervisors have an important role in a family support center. They not only model family support practice for the staff and serve as mentors; they provide support and access to resources and enforce accountability standards and processes. While supervision evolves over time as staff members gain more skills and experience, all supervisors

- clarify job responsibilities for staff members
- provide guidance and training in learning about all aspects of staff jobs
- provide feedback and direction
- recognize growth and effort
- enforce accountability for realistic expectations
- assist with personal goal setting related to work performance and facilitate future skill acquisition

Why Supervision is Important

Below are some of the important purposes of supervision at a family support center.

Supervision Key Practices

1. **Establish supervision as a collaborative process.**

2. **Establish an effective, consistent supervisory system that provides support for all staff members and ensures accountability to participants, funders, and the community.**

3. **Provide regular opportunities for reflection among staff members.**

4. **Ensure that there are mechanisms to support staff when problems or difficult situations arise.**

(Family Support America 1996)

Support for Your Staff

Perhaps the most important goal of supervision is to make sure staff members feel supported in their various activities and duties. When working with children, youth, and families, fatigue and stress occasionally set in. Just the simple act of sitting down and talking with someone about how the job is going, the triumphs and the dilemmas, helps relieve stress. Additionally, some staff members do not receive generous financial compensation for their work, and the degree to which they feel supported plays a significant role in whether or not they decide to stay.

Mentoring and Training

Much of the training that occurs at family support centers takes place during supervision. Because much of staff training occurs on the job and incrementally, supervision plays a critical role in helping staff gain the skills and strategies for effective work with families. Sharing daily experiences with an experienced and trustworthy supervisor helps staff learn and gain confidence in their abilities.

Feedback

Supervision is a staff-development activity. Through supervision, staff members are provided with concrete feedback on how they are doing. Most staff members benefit from being told what they are doing well, and having regular supervision provides time to give them this information. In addition, it gives them an opportunity to explore areas that may need some extra attention and receive feedback on what steps they can take to improve in those areas. Supervision assures staff members of an accountability process, facilitates setting personal goals regarding job performance, and provides a mechanism for checking on progress toward meeting those goals.

Regular Contact with Staff

Supervision facilitates regular contact between supervisors and staff members so that if and when challenges arise, they can be dealt with promptly. Perhaps a staff member is unsure about how to assist a particular family, or is experiencing tension with other staff members; supervision provides an opportunity for these minor difficulties to be resolved before they turn into more significant problems. Having a person to whom one may take concerns is especially important the larger the center is. Having regular contact with this person can relieve anxiety when issues arise and problem solving is needed.

Input from Staff

Sitting down with staff members on a regular basis to listen to their experiences in the center is extremely valuable because it provides insight into the center's strengths and weaknesses. It also provides an opportunity for the center to demonstrate its responsiveness to staff concerns. If several people give similar feedback about a certain issue, practice, or service at the center, center management should take this opportunity to work with them, as a team, to create a solution. Using supervision as a way to foster team building and problem solving demonstrates to the staff that relationships of equality and respect are being practiced and that their thoughts and opinions are valued.

A Teamwork Atmosphere

Supervision can provide staff members with a means to seek each other's advice and work together. The supervisor can facilitate this by linking family workers who are experiencing similar difficulties or who work with the same participants in different contexts. Through his or her knowledge of the activities of individual staff persons, the supervisor is in an excellent position to see these links and to encourage collaboration among the staff.

Maintainance of Agency's Mission

Supervision can provide a forum where staff members can see how their work relates to the overall center and become more familiar with their role within the larger mission. Activities used to provide this forum include regular meetings, periodic team events, yearly goal-setting meetings, and retreats.

The Role of the Supervisor in Monitoring Home Visitors

A Vermont Parent-to-Parent program supervisor described her role in monitoring home visitors in the following way:

- **The supervisor needs to keep home visitors focused on program goals.** Home visitors tend to get wrapped up in the family's immediate concerns and can forget that the program is not designed to solve all the family's problems. Home visitors also need help devising strategies to shift the focus of home visits away from the teen mother's problems exclusively and toward the parent/child relationship and child development issues.

- **The supervisor must help maintain home visitors' sense of identity with the program.** Home visiting, especially in a rural context, can be a very isolating experience as well as an emotionally exhausting one. Home visitors need to feel that the program is behind them and that they have people to turn to when they need support.

- **The supervisor should recognize when home visitors are ready to assess progress, problems, and further information needs.** Home visitors usually need six to eight weeks of home visiting to work out in practice the requirements of their role and the program, and to discover areas in which they lack information. After two months in the Vermont program, the home visitors decided they needed more strategies for involving other members of the family in the program.

From Epstein, Larner, and Halpern 1995, 172.

Principles of Supervision

The following are basic principles that should be integrated into the supervision available at a family support center.

- Supervision should be responsive to staff's stated needs.
- Supervision should include both individual and team sessions.
- When possible, supervision should pair staff and supervisors who get along well personally and professionally.
- Supervision should occur on a regular basis but also be an open system, so that as staff concerns arise, supervisors are available.
- Supervision should be a give-and-take relationship, as learning flows in both directions.
- Supervision should recognize staff competencies, growth, and effort, and not just emphasize areas needing improvement.
- Supervision should be driven by clearly understood, uniformly applied organizational guidelines.

Important Characteristics of a Supervision Setting

When supervising staff members, there are a few elements that should be provided in order to make supervision a positive and constructive experience. They are privacy, uninterrupted time, and a relaxed and comfortable setting. Remember that supervision may take place in different settings, depending on your own or staff members' preferences and on the nature of the subject being discussed. Hence, a supervisor may choose to meet:

- **One-on-one with a staff member:** This is especially good for new staff members or when you need to discuss personal or confidential issues. Be careful not to turn one-on-one sessions into something only done in a negative situation or crisis. Time alone with staff members is valuable when things are going well, too.

- **With a staff dyad:** This context is helpful when two staff members are dealing with similar issues, when you want to pair a newer and a more experienced staff member for mentoring, or when two staff members are working with the same participant in different contexts.

- **With the whole group of staff members:** Getting together a whole group of staff members can be helpful for brainstorming about certain issues as they arise in the center (especially when they affect the entire staff), for training on a specific subject, or just to have a check-in to let everyone share. Convening in a group regularly helps people on the staff get to know one another, creating a more friendly and trusting work setting. For staff members who do most of their work without other staff (e.g., home visitors), providing this peer support can be invaluable.

The timing of supervision, like the place, varies according to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, it is advisable to provide one-on-one supervision more often with staff members new to the program or volunteers. It might be helpful to poll staff members to see what their preferences are regarding the frequency of supervision. One suggestion is to set up "office hours" when people can drop in for supervision as they need it.

Supervision Content

There are many possible sources of "data" to use when supervising and evaluating staff performance. However, for supervision to maximize its effectiveness, you should explore the following sources of information and discuss the following issues:

Sources of Information	Issues to Discuss
• observation of a staff member's interation with participants	• application of family support principles and practices
• case records	• quality of work
• responses of other staff members	• professional conduct
• responses of participants	• punctuality
• staff members' written reports	• skill application
• program data (regarding participation levels and outcome expectations)	• timeliness of task completion
• evaluation reports	• attainment of personal/professional goals
• time sheets	• areas of strengths
• other sources that reveal the extent of the staff member's reliability	• areas for improvement

The above sources provide the supervisor with information on both the staff member's accountability within the program and his or her effectiveness. From this information, the supervisor and the staff member can identify possible areas of growth and set professional and personal goals.

Personnel Policies

Even when addressing office issues, such as attendance and core hours, family support practice must be kept in mind. Just as service flexibility for families is a reflection of family support principles, respect for individual staff members' situations and the provision of flexible benefits should be a cornerstone of a center's personnel policies. In a family support atmosphere, families are regarded as the experts on their own families' needs, and employees should be acknowledged as the experts regarding their own work situation.

Development of the Personnel Policy

Personnel policies are a written set of policies and practices that guide the operation of the center and the work of the staff. The definitions and policies laid out in the personnel manual should be clear and concise so staff members know what is expected of them and what they can expect from the center. These policies are often one of the first introductions a staff member has to his or her job, so an empowering approach must be taken in the organization and wording of the manual. Family support centers should try to make the personnel policies a reflection of family support practice, not just a set of rules and regulations.

Including frontline staff members as well as family members, board members, and volunteers during the development of the personnel policies is strongly recommended. In developing the personnel policies, it is not necessary to start from scratch. Often, a center will draw from the personnel policies of another organization when developing its own policies and adjust them accordingly to fit its own needs.

Content

A personnel policy manual is the written foundation of the staffing and management for any organization. The purpose of the manual is to have, in one place, all relevant and important policies that affect the staff and volunteers of the center. As an organization grows and changes, personnel policies need to be updated. The front of the manual should include a statement regarding periodic reviews and revisions of the policies that incorporate staff involvement. Having staff members involved and invested in the policies will help determine when it is time for a revision.

Some family support centers are linked to parent or host organizations that have existing personnel policies. Ideally, family support principles should be integrated into the host organization's personnel policy.

Orientation to the Policies

Personnel policies are most effective when staff members are introduced to them and given an opportunity to read them thoroughly. One of the first documents that a new staff member should receive is a copy of the personnel manual. The way in which the personnel policy is presented also makes a difference in how staff members respond. Make the policies as concise and easy to understand as possible and the manual easy to use. Incorporating an index, page markers, or color-coding may help make the document easier to read.

Dedicate staff meeting time to reviewing policies, answering questions, and providing a forum that involves staff members. This gives staff members a chance to provide feedback on the policies. All new staff members must have an orientation to the policies and a written copy of the manual.

Offering Family-Supportive Benefits

Benefits are very important to staff members and their families and are another expression of the beliefs and principles that underlie a family support center. The most family-friendly benefits come as a "cafeteria plan" (where employees select from a menu of benefits those that are most helpful for them), but most new organizations do not have the resources to offer that many choices initially. Consulting staff members about their priorities will help focus the decision on which benefits to offer. Some options may be more viable than others, but working with the needs of employees should remain the focus of the organization. Family support centers may want to consider the following benefits:

Flexible Work Arrangements

- flextime schedule
- compressed workweek
- reduced hours
- job-sharing
- telecommuting
- gradual return to work after leaves
- phased retirement

Supportive Time-Off and Leave Policies

- arranged time off to participate in volunteer community activities and school activities
- pooled time off
- family and medical leave that goes farther than the minimums specified by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, e.g., fewer restrictions on use, paid parental leave for natural births and adoption
- extended personal leaves
- use of personal sick time to care for ill family members
- floating holidays, to celebrate religious and cultural traditions

Childcare Services

- resource and referral service to identify care options
- back-up/emergency childcare
- sick childcare
- on-site/near-site childcare centers
- after-school programs
- summer/holiday programs
- dependent care spending accounts
- financial assistance
- discounted or reserved slots
- reimbursement for childcare expenses incurred because of travel or overtime
- contribution toward the cost of adopting a child

Elder Care

- resources, consultations, and referral
- list of vendors and organizations that provide adaptive equipment
- telephone access to family information specialists

Voluntary Benefits (available, but paid by the employees)

- prefunded life insurance
- supplemental life insurance
- prefunded college tuition
- homeowners insurance
- auto insurance
- legal services
- long-term care insurance
- financial planning
- home mortgage
- consumer purchasing service

Financial Assistance for Personal Responsibilities

- tuition reimbursement for degree programs
- scholarship assistance for children of employees
- commuter assistance (transit subsidy or parking subsidy)
- preretirement counseling

Personnel Policies Checklist

Office Practices
- ☐ work hours (core hours, flex time)
- ☐ time reporting
- ☐ attendance record keeping
- ☐ weather closing policy
- ☐ compensation time (accumulation and use)
- ☐ overtime
- ☐ job-sharing policy

Employment Practices
- ☐ new employee orientation
- ☐ termination of employment
- ☐ reinstatement
- ☐ promotions and transfers
- ☐ complaint procedure
- ☐ separation of service (resignation, retirement, death)

Absences And Time Off
- ☐ holidays
- ☐ vacations
- ☐ sick/personal days
- ☐ religious observances
- ☐ bereavement
- ☐ jury duty
- ☐ family/medical leave
- ☐ extended medical leave
- ☐ personal leave
- ☐ military leave

Compensation
- ☐ salary reviews
- ☐ pay
- ☐ benefits
- ☐ performance awards
- ☐ reimbursement policies
- ☐ expense and travel policies
- ☐ purchase approval policy

Equal Employment Opportunity
- ☐ harassment policy
- ☐ substance abuse
- ☐ nondiscrimination policy

Employee Responsibilities
- ☐ attendance and punctuality
- ☐ requests for information
- ☐ confidentiality rules
- ☐ incident reporting
- ☐ telephone usage
- ☐ reimbursement for lost or stolen property
- ☐ computer use
- ☐ safety precautions

☐ **Organizational Charts**

Wellness and Health Programs

- wellness newsletters
- telephone consultation for health care questions
- fitness/exercise center
- health screenings, flu shots, consultations
- maternity/prenatal education
- lactation program
- stress reduction programs
- nutritional counseling
- personal safety program
- smoking cessation programs
- lunchtime seminars
- employee support groups
- employee assistance program

Creating a Team

A family-supportive organization needs to have personal and professional bonds that hold together during stressful times. The goal is to build a supportive team that is flexible and engaged, willing to pitch in, and amenable to agreed-upon operating policies. Allowing time for fun in the center, such as celebrating birthdays and special occasions, fosters team building and a more family-like environment. Procedures for these celebrations can be incorporated into the personnel policy for consistency purposes.

Include the family members of the staff in some events. Create and seize opportunities to get to know each other by having fun outside of the center. One organization has a planned staff "huddle" every Monday during which the staff spends informal time together to discuss anything that is on their minds, such as how their weekend was. These huddles can be moved out to parks or restaurants for a more informal session away from the office environment. Another idea is to have one noon hour per week or per month when staff members can gather informally for lunch and share their nonwork interests with each other.

Open Communication Policy

It is essential to the success of the center that members of the staff understand each other. Honoring each employee as important and providing opportunities for everyone to be heard contributes to a healthy work environment. Employees should know that complaints, concerns, or comments can be presented without fear of reprisal in any form. Hence, the following could serve as a template for addressing complaints, concerns, or comments after the employee's normal efforts have not resolved an issue:

- The employee shall present a written and signed complaint, comment, or concern to his or her supervisor/manager and provide a copy for the center director within 10 working days of the event or emergence of an issue. The supervisor shall meet with the employee to discuss the issue within five working days.

- If the employee is not satisfied with the meeting, the employee shall contact the center director in writing within five working days. The center director shall then meet with the employee within 10 working days of receiving the written complaint and make every effort to resolve the matter.

- If the issue is still not satisfactorily resolved, the employee shall submit the issue to the board of directors within 10 working days of meeting with the center director. Any actions made in relation to this process shall be reported to the employee and shall be final and binding.

All steps in this process should be taken as quickly as possible.

Enforcement and Legal Issues

Each center needs to find a balance between consistency of policies (for the sake of fairness) and flexibility of individual responses. Random enforcement of policies, either by the employee or the supervisor, leads to misunderstandings and problems. Hence, each family support center must develop a strategy for enforcing its personnel policies. How vigorous the enforcement will be is a decision for each organization to make. Included in the personnel manual should be a simple statement such as the following: "These policies are meant to be followed, but exceptional situations do arise that require flexibility. When these situations arise, (insert your organization here) will address them fairly and expeditiously."

Depending on the situation and past precedent, consequences of policy violations vary. Enforcement of the personnel policies is similar to staff members' grievance process. These grievances should be discussed by the staff member and his or her supervisor in a collaborative way—what can they do together to fix the problem at hand? This meeting should not end without a solid plan for how the situation will be solved. A record of the complaint or incident and the agreed-upon plan should be kept on file. Any penalties for certain behaviors should be stated up-front as part of staff orientation to the organization, as well as included in the personnel policy manual, so that confusion about consequences is minimized. Penalties for unacceptable behavior should be graduated.

Legal issues affect every organization, whether they are small or large. To protect the family support center from liability and to promote a healthy program environment, personnel policies should include policies about drugs, alcohol, sexual harassment, and equal employment opportunity.

Worksheet 1:
Essential Characteristics for Family Support Staff

Make copies available to be filled out with different interviewees.

		Indicators—How Can You Tell?
Personal Qualities	Caring	
	Intuitiveness	
	Capacity for self-reflection	
	Openness to new ways of thinking and doing	
	Emotional stability	
	Common sense	
	Authenticity and honesty	
Competencies of Frontline Staff	Ability to translate theory into practice	
	Capacity to identify with participants without loss of personal identity	
	Capacity to contain conflicts and wait for resolution	
Competencies of Managers	Ability to experiment and take risks	
	Capacity for allowing staff to make individualized decisions	
	Ability to tolerate ambiguity	

Characteristics adapted from Stott and Musick 1994.

Worksheet 2:
How Family Support Principles Affect Training

Principle	Training Processes
Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.	• Staff and parents serve as cotrainers together. • Training is participatory rather than expert-driven, and the expertise of all participants is recognized. • Training covers issues such as power sharing, trust building, and empathy.
Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.	• Training incorporates opportunities for participants to model their new-found skills. • Training is organized around the development of specific competencies.
Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.	• Training provides opportunities for participants to learn from each other and share expertise. • Training is interactive, with the knowledge base being developed in part by the group.
Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.	• Training is grounded in the culture and practices of participants and of the communities in which they work. • Consideration is given to participants' cultural, racial, and linguistic values, needs, and preferences.
Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.	• Training is grounded in the realities of the communities in which participants work, and participants are encouraged to bring examples from their own communities to the training. • Trainers help build a community among participants, helping people to get to know each other and to work together.
Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.	• Principles of fairness and equity are modeled in the training—who gets to speak, how decisions are made. • Trainers help to build a critical understanding of social service systems—how they can serve as critical supports for families and how they can serve as barriers to family success.
Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.	• Training emphasizes not only formal service systems, but also informal systems.
Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.	• Training is flexible and designed to be shaped by the particular needs and interests of participants. • Training models adult-learning principles.
Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.	• Training is holistic, emphasizing how any aspect of practice is tied to the whole.

Principle	Training Content
Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.	Relationship building • trust building • power sharing • partnering with families Empowerment
Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.	Child development • developmental screenings • developmental milestones Youth development Adult development • goal setting • decision making • fostering self-esteem • fostering optimism Family dynamics/family development • goal setting • decision making Parent education • fostering healthy adult/child interaction • working with fathers and mothers
Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.	Strengths-based approach • identifying strengths/family assessment • social environmental frameworks
Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.	Working cross-culturally • identifying/working with cultural guides • intercultural communication skills • culturally responsive practice • celebrating cultural differences Cultural transmission through parenting Combating bias • understanding oppression • understanding classism • understanding institutional racism • understanding our own biases Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion
Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.	Community building • community ownership/engagement • community mobilization • civics and democracy Community collaboration • coalition building • community assessment • strategic planning Community development
Programs advocate with families for service and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.	Advocacy • organizing • policymaking • understanding systems Systems change • collaboration

	• community governance • parent involvement Parent leadership • identifying/supporting the development of leaders • creating/supporting leadership roles
Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.	Resource and referral • community assessment • follow-up Family assessment/planning Social support networks • organizing support groups • identifying/building family networks • creating peer-to-peer linkages Maintaining confidentiality
Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.	Strategic planning Community assessment Outreach Home visiting Supporting families in crisis • recognizing abuse and neglect • recognizing domestic violence • recognizing chemical dependency • mandated reporting • diffusing crisis, conflict resolution, mediation
Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.	Principles, philosophy, and language of family support Family leadership and involvement

Sample Job Description

Family Support Worker

Qualifications

Must be at least 21 years of age and must have completed two years of college credits in a human service field or have two years of experience in a human services agency. Must demonstrate the ability to work cooperatively with the staff and a variety of persons external to the family support center, including representatives of other agencies and parents. Must have experience working effectively in a multicultural setting and the ability to model and teach appropriate interaction with children and parents.

Responsibilities

This worker will

- uphold and demonstrate family support principles and practices
- provide support to families in the center
- offer parenting classes and facilitate parent support groups
- offer practical suggestions and guidance to parents with regard to parent/child interactions, child-rearing techniques, and child development
- provide family members with necessary referrals to other needed services
- network with other providers of community services and resources
- elicit and encourage community involvement in planning and decision-making activities of the center
- help maintain a referral library of available community resources
- work with and train volunteers
- participate in the general management and maintenance of the center
- participate in evaluation of services to ensure that performance standards and required outcomes are met
- maintain accurate records
- assist in the development and monitoring of the calendar of events
- attend seminars/workshops for education and personal growth

Resources

Training

Publications

Building Villages to Raise Our Children: Staffing
By M. R. Hochberg. 1993. Cambridge, Mass.: The Harvard Family Research Project.

Empowerment Skills for Family Workers: The Comprehensive Curriculum of the New York State Family Development Credential
By C. Dean. 1997. Cornell Empowering Families Project. New York: Cornell University.

Guidelines for Family Support Practice
Family Support America. 1996. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

How You Are Is As Important as What You Do
By J. Pawl and M. St. John. 1999. Washington D.C.: Zero to Three.

Learning to Be Partners: An Introductory Training Program for Family Support Staff
L. E. Pooley, F. Woratschek, and J. Williams, editors. 1997. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Partnering: Parents and Professionals Working Together
By P. J. Wallis. 1990. New York: Office of Advocate for the Disabled.

Making Room at the Table: Fostering Family Involvement in the Planning and Governance of Formal Support Systems
By E. Jeppson, J. Thomas, A. Markward, J. Kelly, G. Koser, and D. Diehl. 1997. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America.

Supervision

Publications/Videos

Learning through Supervision and Mentorship to Support the Development of Infants, Toddlers and Their Families: A Sourcebook
E. Fenichel, ed. 1992. Washington, D.C.: Zero to Three.

Reflective Supervision: A Relationship for Learning—A Training Videotape, Discussion Guide, and Sourcebook
By L. Gilkerson, R. Shahmoon Shanok, and J. Pawl. 1995. Washington D.C.: Zero to Three.

On-Line Resources

Basic Guidebook to Staff Supervision and Policies
By C. McNamara. www.mapnp.org/library/mgmnt/prsnlmnt.htm.

Personnel

On-Line Resources

The Health Insurance Resource Center
www.healthinsurance.org

International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans
www.ifebp.org

Nonprofit Financial Center
www.nonprofitfinancial.org

Nonprofit's Essential Handbook on Insurance
www.iiaa.iix.com

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Harkavy, O., and Bond, J. T. (1992) "Program operations: Time allocation and cost analysis," in Larner M., Halpern R., and Harkavy, O., editors, *Fair start for children: Lessons learned from seven demonstration projects* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press)

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Hochberg, M. R. (1995) *Building villages to raise our children: Staffing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Family Research Project)

Lopez, M. E., and Hochberg, M. R. (1995) *Paths to school readiness: An in-depth look at three early childhood programs* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Family Research Project)

Norton, D. (1994) "Education for professionals in family support," in Kagan, S. L., and Weissbourd, B., eds., *Putting families first: America's family support movement and the challenge of change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass)

Stott, F., and Musick, J. S. (1994) "Supporting the family support worker," in Kagan, S. L., and Weissbourd, B., eds., *Putting families first: America's family support movement and the challenge of change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass)

Whitebrook, M., Howes, C., and Phillips, D. (1990) *Who cares: Childcare, teachers, and the quality of care in America* (Oakland, Calif.: Childcare Employee Project)

Chapter 9

Creating an Optimal Space

Creating an Optimal Space

The environment in which family support center services are delivered can have a profound impact on their effectiveness. Where a center is located and how the space is organized affects which families participate, which activities are offered, who works at the center, and even the effectiveness of services and programs. Planning the programmatic environment is an important part of designing the family support center.

Increasingly, families represent many different configurations. A growing number of single-parent families, headed by mothers as well as fathers, are caring for and nurturing children and need the support that a family support center can provide. Additionally, there is an expanding population of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members who are assuming the role of caregiver for children. They need to be connected to community resources. These realities require family support centers to meet the challenge of choosing and designing a location that is welcoming and supportive of many different types of families. The suggestions for space characteristics in this chapter can serve as a starting point.

In this chapter, many considerations for an ideal family support environment are offered. Most centers must weigh the pros and cons of different options, deciding which factors are the most important for their particular communities. Because of constraints in resources and spaces available, centers that "have it all" are few and far between.

Matching the Site to Your Services

Whether you are trying to choose among different location options or designing a center for a site that has already been chosen, it is important to review the intended uses of that space. First, consider which age groups will be served:

- infants
- young children
- older children
- youths/teenagers
- adults
- older adults

Will you be serving anyone with special needs?

- people with larger bodies
- people who want or need to be active (e.g., those with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders, those who prefer to be active rather than sit and talk)
- people whose activities are limited (those with disabilities, older adults, etc.)

How many programs will be offered? How many participants would the center like to serve with each program? Estimate the maximum number of persons that could be in the center in one time and the space required to run different programs simultaneously. Include the number of staff who must be present. *Take into consideration how the program may grow in the next five years.*

Consider the activities that will take place as part of those programs. Will participants need space to be active? Will they need an area free of distractions for quiet activities (e.g., children's naps)? Will space be shared by persons of different ages (e.g., for family-development activities)? Will there need to be space for outdoor activities? Will there need to be space for private conversations, either among a small group or between two individuals?

At the end of this chapter, a number of worksheets are included to help you think through these considerations. Three of these worksheets can be used before you start looking for a location so that you can have an idea of spatial needs based on your programs and activities. Worksheet 1 is a questionnaire that you can use to review the services you expect to offer and the spatial needs that accompany specific activities. Worksheet 2 is a table that you can use to lay out general spatial needs of different programs in the center. Worksheet 3 is a blank form that you can use to plan how different programs could be scheduled, based on their general (and specific) spatial needs. These worksheets also may be used after you find a location so that you can plan the most effective use of your space.

How Our Center Does It

Children's Services of Sno-Valley

Washington

Location

Located in a semirural area, Children's Services of Sno-Valley is in the middle of an expanse of green with a view of Mount Si, a focal point for recreation in the community. It is easily accessed by bus service and is a block away from the major rural route between North Bend and Snoqualmie. Families from several towns making up the upper Snoqualmie Valley community use the center.

Building

The entrance of the building is inviting, with chairs and some toys, as well as a rack of information about programs, activities, and other community resources. The receptionists make a point of getting acquainted with everyone who comes in.

The building has been designed with young children in mind. The rooms are located along a hallway that has several skylights bringing lots of light into the space. There are large two-way mirrors looking into each of the classrooms, making it easy for parents and others to watch the children at their activities.

The three classrooms and one community meeting room are used for multiple purposes. The windows in the rooms are low, making it easy and fun for children to look outside. Connecting the classrooms are child-sized bathrooms with low toilets and sinks. (Adult-sized bathrooms also are included.) The classrooms are used for infant/toddler playgroups, preschool, childcare, summer camp, and various other activities for children. The community room is used for meetings, workshops, childcare cooperative sessions, and parenting education classes, and on Thursdays it is the local WIC clinic, which offers a well-child clinic, WIC vouchers, and maternity support services.

A kitchen serves lunches to preschoolers and goodies and snacks for other events and meetings. It has a small round table that invites sitting for discussions or meals, and the coffee is always on. Across the hall from the preschool classrooms is a "parent café" with a large round table for meetings or projects, a computer for parent use, and one wall for a resource library. This room has an area with a small refrigerator and sink, so snacks or drinks can easily be made.

Down a short hall off the main hall there is a unique space for our Parent-Child Interaction Training (PCIT). A two-way mirror and a hearing device in a parent's ear allow a trainer to coach parents in a systematic series of activities with their children, encouraging and supporting them as they learn specific parenting skills.

Overall, the building has a calm, warm feeling about it. The walls are painted various shades of cream and gray, and the carpet is the same throughout—a speckled dark gray with flecks of warm colors in it. Artwork and photographs along the hall have a rural theme, and a couple of quilts hanging in the office and colorful toys and climbing equipment throughout are clear indications that families with young children play and learn here.

Outside
The front of the building is fully landscaped with plants and trees that need a minimum of maintenance. In the back is a play yard for children, with a special section fenced off just for toddlers. A climbing structure, a tunnel, logs to jump from, and a digging place, all surrounded by a tricycle path, create a fun space for kids.

Description provided by Nancy Whitaker, Program Director

Starting the Planning

The potential participants in a family support center must be included in planning its location, space configuration, and decor. They can convey their priorities for the space, in particular regarding elements of design and characteristics of the space that may increase or decrease its accessibility for them. Consider using a site or location committee to help locate space in the community. Community members may have a better sense of what is available and how different areas are perceived. Additionally, consider holding a focus group on characteristics participants would want to see in a location. Once a location is found, enlist the involvement of potential participants in finishing the space and decorating it in the ways they have recommended.

Collaborate with other agencies already in the community. Speak with collaborative partners to find out what they have found to be useful in their site and what they would look for if choosing a new site. Consider co-locating with a potential partner to facilitate collaborative processes.

If possible, add to your board one or two members who have expertise in choosing and/or maintaining a facility, such as architects, real estate agents, or building managers. Solicit pro bono donations from experts who are not on the board.

Choosing a Site

The physical setting of a family support center has important symbolic and practical implications. The location communicates the extent of the center's connection to the community, the center's alliance with a sponsoring agency, and the center's primary service-delivery orientation (e.g., health and wellness, community economic development, school readiness, and so on; see chapters 3 and 4). Also, the physical setting can expand or limit the center's perceived and actual accessibility, thereby increasing or decreasing the center's impact on its community. Given these important ramifications, you should consider all possible center locations.

As evidenced by the diversity of program settings across the nation, you have many options. The center can choose a new or converted location of its own (i.e., be freestanding), or it may choose to locate within a larger agency. If co-locating, be sure that the existing agency is supportive of family support practice and activities. The following is a list of location options to consider when thinking about sharing space:

- cultural center
- day care center
- school
- community/neighborhood center
- church/place of worship
- other nonprofit
- library
- medical facility (hospital, clinic)
- job training/unemployment center
- laundromat
- housing project
- mental health facility (community health center)
- recreation center
- food stamp center
- mall
- athletic center
- senior citizens' center

After reviewing the center's programmatic and space needs and weighing site options, a few additional variables should be considered. In particular, the location committee or advisory group should examine shared versus independent space issues, affordability, and accessibility.

How Our Center Does It

School-Based Family Resource Center

Vernon, Connecticut

When I was asked to manage a new school-based family resource center in Vernon, Connecticut, I enthusiastically agreed. The state funds 60 of these, and having operated one in Manchester, I felt confident that the model was easily replicated. But while our center in Manchester had a prime classroom location directly across from the principal's office, in Vernon, there was no single room made available. Our first creative solution was to share a small room with speech and language therapists. There were challenges. For example, the ringer on the phone had to be turned off during testing in the adjacent cubicle—which restricted staff's ability to provide resource and referral information, a critical service component of the center. We found many solutions that have allowed us to provide family support services in the spirit in which they are intended, even in a severely restricted space:

- collaborating with churches, the public library, the hospital, the YMCA, and preschools
- offering summer playgroups in vacant classrooms
- providing parent education in the school library in the evening
- riding the kindergarten school buses during the first few weeks of school to help estabolish relationships with children and parents
- purchasing books on parenting and placing them in the school library for parents to read there
- offering mini-grants to buy supplies for teachers who provide family literacy programming in other spaces
- collaborating with the home-based component of Waterford Reading, a family literacy program
- providing books on parenting topics for a raffle at the school's open house
- cosponsoring a summer reading program: while children worked with teachers, staff interacted with parents, and gave them written materials, such as bookmarks that stress the importance of reading
- attending faculty meetings and having lunch in the teachers' lounge
- sharing bulletin board space in the main hallway with the parent-teacher organization

Most helpful have been our wonderful collaborative relationships with other neighborhood entities. These significantly ease the burden of space requirements and give our family support staff countless opportunities for connecting with families. In four years of operation, our roots have been set in the school, with branches reaching out to the community at large.

Description provided by Cindi Guerrei

Independent Space versus Shared Space

There are advantages and disadvantages to both independent space and shared space. If the center has its own space, it may have more control over what hours it keeps, the uses of its space, its service philosophy, and so on.

Sometimes having another agency or community provider provide space for center activities enhances center programs. If located within another agency, the center may more easily grow its program by gaining participants from the host agency. For example, rural family support centers may want to partner with schools, which serve most children in the community. This shared space can provide a valuable way to reach out to families that you may otherwise have been unable to engage. In addition, schools are often places already comfortable to and familiar to parents. The space-sharing agencies might also be able to share occupancy costs (such as maintenance) and/or utilities. Staff could be more easily cross-trained, and their time may be divided between the two agencies. The host agency may also be able to share valuable space resources—meeting rooms, gymnasiums, and other equipment. However, being in another agency's space may also limit the hours a family support center can be open and the kinds of activities that can take place. Consider how the agencies will resolve disputes if they arise. If shared space is chosen, be sure to discuss these issues up front and put agreed-upon processes and relationships in writing.

Affordability

One of the first considerations when examining each site is how much it will cost the agency to be located in that space. Keep in mind the following:

- **Rental price:** For how long is the price guaranteed? Is there a discount for signing a long-term lease?
- **Build-out costs:** These expenses include any renovations needed before the center moves in or in the future. Such expenses may include tearing down or building walls, installing cubicles and partial walls, installing new light fixtures, removing old carpet and repairing a wood floor underneath, etc. Sometimes building management companies cover build-out costs for long-term leases. Approach the landlord of the building and inquire about any such deals.
- **Heat:** How much does the space cost to heat in the wintertime? Ask the electric or gas company what their records indicate. Consider how well or how poorly the space is insulated.
- **Air conditioning:** Does the space have central air conditioning? What are the monthly costs? Ask the electric company what their records indicate. Again, consider how well or how poorly the space is insulated.
- **Water:** Is water included in the rent or is it a separate utility to be paid by the occupant?

Also consider what it may cost to maintain and clean the center. (For more on this subject, see the last section of this chapter.)

- How many staff hours will be spent in cleaning?
- Are staff, volunteers, or a cleaning business able to offer some in-kind time?
- What quantity of cleaning supplies will be needed?
- How often will they need to be replenished?
- If the center is located in or affiliated with another agency, can it provide resources for these services?
- Are there adequate, well-placed phone jacks and electrical outlets?
- Do they need to be added or moved?
- Does any painting need to be done?
- Do additional phone or computer lines need to be installed?

Accessibility

The accessibility of the family support center is an important contributor to the success of programs. Maximizing accessibility helps the center be most responsive and welcoming to the diversity of its community. Consider the following when assessing how accessible different locations are, both physically and psychologically.

Operating hours

Being available evenings, nights, early mornings, weekends, and holidays maximizes accessibility for parents working on a variety of schedules. It also demonstrates cultural responsiveness, acknowledging that not all participants celebrate the same holidays.

Transportation

Being near public transportation increases access to the center for participants who do not own their own cars, cannot drive (e.g., if they are elderly or under the legal driving age), or have irregular access to a car. Having parking available nearby allows participants quicker access to the center. Consider locating in an area that has a lot of available parking. If this is not an option, partner with a local business or another service provider who does have available parking that may be traded for other services that the center could offer.

Safety

Is the location on a safe block or street? Is the area well lit? Is there safe transportation available in the evening hours? Either locating near safe, reliable evening transportation routes or directly providing that transportation enhances families' sense of safety. Gang territory must also be considered, since rival gang members and their families may be risking their lives if they have to cross boundaries to reach the center. If this is the case, consider locating in neutral territory or providing safe transportation and more extensive outreach to these families.

Culture

The center's location should be conducive to its mission with respect to serving its community or target population, whether it is multicultural or there is a single culture. For example, if the center wishes to serve a diverse group of people, locating in an ethnic enclave may decrease the likelihood of other groups participating. If the center seeks to serve a certain ethnic group that is currently underserved by other programs, locating in a space where that group would be comfortable should be of primary interest.

Disabilities

Having wheelchair-accessible entrances, hallways, and bathrooms not only conveys the message that the center welcomes all potential participants, it also is legally required by the Americans With Disabilities Act (see sidebar).

Seasons

Different seasons bring different weather and amounts of natural light, which can affect programming. For example, heavy snowfall may make transportation to centers located in rural areas difficult.

ADA Regulations for Accessible Space

The Americans with Disabilities Act sets accessibility guidelines for nonprofit organizations and private businesses. These regulations are included in state and local building codes.

Removing Barriers: Includes but is not limited to:
- installing ramps
- making curb cuts in sidewalks and entrances
- repositioning shelves
- adding raised markings on elevator control buttons
- installing flashing alarm lights
- widening doors
- installing offset hinges to widen doorways
- eliminating a turnstile or providing an alternative accessible path
- installing accessible door hardware
- installing grab bars in toilet stalls
- rearranging toilet partitions to increase maneuvering space
- insulating lavatory pipes under sinks to prevent burns
- installing a raised toilet seat
- installing a full-length bathroom mirror
- repositioning the paper towel dispenser in the bathroom
- creating designated accessible parking spaces
- installing accessible paper cup dispenser at an existing inaccessible water fountain
- removing high-pile, low-density carpeting
- Installing vehicle hand controls

Priority Setting
1. Take measures to provide access from public sidewalks, parking, or public transportation.
2. Take measures to provide access to those areas of the agency where goods and services are made available to participants (i.e., Adjusting layout of sales racks, rearranging tables, providing Braille and raised character signage, etc.)
3. Take measures to provide access to restroom facilities.
4. Take any other measures necessary to provide access to the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of the agency.

From ADA Title III Regulations, Sec. 36.304

Compliance With Regulations

In addition to the above programmatic considerations and the ADA, there are other regulations that can affect the operation of the center in various sites:

- What are the fire and safety codes?
- What zoning regulations pertain to different activities and regulate different locations?
- Are some areas more restrictive?
- Would regulations adversely affect services and programs?
- Do zoning rulings allow you to place a sign in front of your facility?
- What sizes and types are permitted?
- Are there zoning restrictions regarding traffic patterns or parking arrangements?
- What is the maximum number of people that can be accommodated by the space, and does it fit with your expected participant attendance?
- What are the state childcare facility codes?

Checklists and questionnaires at the end of the chapter provide for an in-depth assessment of facilities and outdoor play space. Worksheet 4 includes considerations for accessibility, aesthetics, air quality, layout/floor space, lighting, location, maintenance/upkeep, security, and storage, as well as for plumbing, electrical, and other systems. Worksheet 5 includes considerations for general play space area and equipment.

Leasing or Buying Property

Besides narrowing site options based on programmatic needs and considerations such as accessibility and safety, your site search group must also consider the affordability of the site. A large part of this affordability equation is the monthly payment the center must make to use its property and whether it is rent or a mortgage payment. Below are some factors to examine before making a final site decision.

Considerations When Leasing

Landlord and tenant must agree in writing about proposed use of the facility:

1. Are you permitted to add on to expand?
2. Are there any limitations to the site's use?
3. How will you mediate disputes?
4. Will you be allowed to use outdoor space for a playground?
5. Can you erect a fence?
6. Can you use space after normal business hours for meetings or activities or events?
7. Agree on rental fee and time availability of the building.
8. Be sure that all plumbing and sewer systems are operable.
9. Decide who will be responsible for repairs, maintenance, snow removal, lawn care, etc.

From Gallagher 1994

Lease Terms

A lease is a binding contract between a landlord (lessor) and a tenant (lessee) for the occupation of premises or land for a specific period of time in return for rent (Chen and MacAulay 1999, 91–93). When searching for space in the community, family support centers should carefully compare the lease options of different sites. You may be able to find a location that offers a less expensive monthly payment, but the location may offer fewer of the characteristics discussed in this chapter as being important to the center. The family support center should carefully weigh low operating costs against these other important considerations.

Each lease and rent structure is unique and thus should be negotiated carefully. There are fixed, net, and gross rents. Fixed rents are those in which a certain monthly payment amount is guaranteed over the term of the lease. As no standard definitions of net and gross rents exist, the exact meaning should be spelled out in the lease. Gross rents may contain an "escalator clause" that would permit increases in the rent to cover any increase in property taxes. Net leases generally have the lessor pay for the municipal charges, utilities, and other property operating expenses.

If you are considering a rental space, your lawyer should verify the identity of the owner and ensure that there are no legal agreements or conditions relating to the property that are not in the interests of the center. The steps described below under "signing the lease" actually are part of the process of choosing a property. If the lease you are considering does not adequately address all of your needs and those of the families you intend to serve, continue your search for a home for your center.

If You Are Considering Buying

Many family support centers consider only renting when looking for a location. However, owning property for the center has many advantages similar to the advantages a family gains in owning a home versus renting an apartment. If you are making a monthly mortgage payment, you build equity and you gain a sense of ownership. You won't have landlord-imposed restrictions on your activities or limits on renovations to your space (beyond financial limits). However, owning your own property does carry additional costs. Some expenses that may have been covered by a landlord become the center's responsibility (e.g., maintenance and repairs, snow removal, etc.). Owning your own property also necessitates additional accounting time, so appreciation/depreciation of property value is accounted for in the center's financial records. Consult with other agencies in your area to learn more about their experiences with renting versus owning.

When looking for possible sources of mortgage funds, consider

- bank loans and mortgages
- housing department programs (local, state, or national)
- your local departments of planning, development, or commerce
- your local park district

Finalizing a Lease

The landlord should be informed in writing about the activities that will take place in the center year-round, including outdoor activities where applicable. Ensure that all activities are permitted under the property's zoning. Check to make sure neighbors do not object to any activities associated with the center, such as increased street parking, outdoor activities, and so on.

In the process of negotiating a lease, request a complete description of the property and permitted uses. Be sure to note any damage the property may already have, so that the landlord can repair it before you move in and that the center will not held liable for that damage upon the end of the lease. Make sure the permitted uses are also listed in your lease agreement before you sign. For space in a commercial building or residential apartment or complex, the space description should include a plan indicating the dimensions of the primary space and storage areas, hours, and method of access, emergency access, laundry (if applicable), the allocated parking, and whose responsibility it is to pay for extermination expenses (if applicable). Commercial rents are usually quoted in terms of a cost per square foot of space per year. Check to ensure that the space has been measured accurately. Sometimes measurements for commercial space are exaggerated, since the annual rent is linked directly to square footage. Only the actual floor space should be used to calculate the total area.

How Our Center Does It

The Children's Place
Washington, D.C.

A staff member at the Children's Place describes the center's process of securing space as follows:

"We began negotiating with the landlord, who turned out to be a large Massachusetts corporation. The rent was double what we projected we could afford, so we bargained, arguing (through the corporation's lawyer) that renting to a nonprofit corporation would provide them with tax benefits, and that since the space had gone unrented for more than a year, they were better off going with us at a lower rate than continuing to collect nothing at all. Miraculously, the corporation agreed. We had a home at a price we could afford."

Specify program requirements such as partitions, outlets, appliances, and air conditioning. A clause requiring proper upkeep of the property should be included, as well as one concerning routine cleaning, snow removal, and ice control (on walks and roof), if applicable. Describe a procedure for assessing and covering any renovation costs.

If a long-term lease is involved, a method of covering any unexpected increases in costs including taxes and extraordinary maintenance or repairs must be described in the lease. Information about property taxes can be found at the local municipal tax office. Avoid a surprise tax increase by ensuring that the current taxes are not based on a lower assessed value of the property established before it was renovated.

Since many programs have uncertain funding sources, a short-term lease with renewal linked to receipt of annual funding may be the most appropriate route. However, if the program is assured a steady stream of support, a longer-term lease with lower rent may be better. Alternatively, you may be able to negotiate a long-term lease that includes an escape clause that could be used in the event that the program's funding is not renewed. Generally, the longer the term of the lease, the more favorable the rates.

Your lawyer should carefully review any lease agreement before it receives final approval of the board and is signed by the executive officer.

Making the Space Your Own

The ways in which the center is designed and customized in part determine the number and type of activities that can be offered there. The design also contributes to the center's welcoming atmosphere. It is important to be mindful of safety issues and to design space that maximizes everyone's ability to be active in the center. Like all other aspects of program planning, space design should be a careful and inclusive process to maximize its effectiveness. Worksheet 6, at the end of the chapter, provides you with criteria for judging how family-supportive your space is.

General Suggestions

All Centers

Space can be organized into separate areas:

- areas for large group activities and recreation
- smaller area(s) for childcare
- one or more enclosed private areas where confidential interviews and conversations may take place
- a secure location for staff records and plans.

The space should be organized so that it responds to participants' needs and the planned activities. Uncluttered surroundings are safer and more stimulating. Most important, design the space in a way that makes it usable for many different kinds of activities. No center can do everything. Consider using screens or mobile walls to enlarge or segment spaces in response to programmatic needs. Also consider using furniture with wheels so that it can be easily moved around and space rearranged. (If using wheels, be sure that they have stoppers, so that furniture is not unsafe.)

Try to make the space comfortable by designing it as families would design a home:

- Include sofas and comfortable chairs, sized in a way to be comfortable for a variety of body sizes and shapes.
- Hang curtains instead of blinds.
- Place rugs on hardwood or tile floors.
- Hang children's drawings on the walls.
- Decorate using warm, welcoming colors.
- Hang plants (out of children's reach).
- Use lamps instead of overhead lights.
- Post photos of all staff members; include their names, the programs they work in, and the hours that they are at the center.

To find out what families consider comfortable and welcoming features, consider running focus groups in which a diverse group of community members are involved. In the past, family-serving programs unintentionally overlooked the center's appeal to fathers and other adult or teen males during the design process. Now more and more are helping to draw men to their programs by

- including community men in the focus groups for designing family support center space
- ensuring that positive images of men as fathers and role models appear in publications, pictures, and parenting materials available in the center
- making sure baby changing stations are available in the men's lavatory
- in places where magazines are left out for reading, including publications that are aimed not just at mothers, but at fathers too

Children's Space

Research shows that having 40–50 square feet of play area per child and having one-third to one-half of the total play area clear provides an ideal setting for children's activities. Not every center can accomplish this. Research also demonstrates that as the number of children using a facility increases, so must the square footage per child and the amount of uncovered space (The Children's Place 1985, 51) However, many centers operate successfully without this much space.

- Make all activity centers visible to children; pathways should visually lead a participant from one area to another without crossing through the play areas so activities are not disrupted. Also, make pathways wide enough so that participants may easily pass one another and so that strollers, etc., have enough room as well.

- Having large open areas can waste space as well as present dangers for children. Children love to run, and leaving space to do this in the center may present a hazard. Arrange space so that infants and young, unsteady toddlers are free from the dangers of older children charging around on toys or leaping from gym equipment (The Children's Place 1985, 51). However, having open space around individual activities prevents territorial squabbles.

- Try to foresee potentially hazardous places that children may consider play areas (e.g., toilets as water games, shelves as climbing toys) and situate a good substitute nearby (e.g., a squirt gun area near the bathroom, a jungle gym somewhat near the shelves).

Adult Space

For adults, too, there should be some separate space where they may relax among peers, drink coffee, and feel at home while their children participate in center activities. This space should be set up to encourage discussion, with comfortable seats facing one another. Often centers combine this space with resource libraries where parents can read publications and view videotapes on topics such as child development and parenting skills.

Family Space

There should be some area where children and their parents can interact, both for the enhancement of family relationships and for parents to learn parenting skills. This space should include furniture and equipment appropriate for children and adults, so that both are comfortable. Also include space appropriate for adults with infants. Parents should have a place to nurse babies and change diapers, while infants should be provided with cribs, play pens, and high chairs.

Adjacent Space and Complementary Functions

- Create a layout that maximizes efficient use of staff time.
- Arrange spaces so that those with a high level of traffic between them are located adjacent to one another. This will reduce the amount of corridor spaces needed.
- Locate activities with similar functions together; for example, utility rooms, mechanical rooms and janitorial rooms are usually put close together to save on the amount of connections systems.
- Locate noisy activity areas together, away from areas that need more quiet.

From Chen and McAulay 1999

Adolescent Space

Consider setting aside a special place that adolescent participants may call their own—where they can have some privacy, play their music, and decorate as they please. Teens often want a place separate from the younger children where they can assert independence and interact with peers. Add computers, homework areas, and areas for socializing such as coffee shops or snack areas. If the center has sufficient space, consider making pool and Ping-Pong tables or basketball hoops available. If there is a teen-to-teen counseling or tutoring program, consider having it take place in the teens' area.

Cultural Representation

In a culturally responsive center, pictures and signs reflect the look of the community—community members' faces are mirrored in the center's decorations. Signs and postings are made in community members' language and English. Festive decorations for holidays are displayed equitably for different local cultures and are discussed so that community members may become more understanding, knowledgeable, and excited about other community members' traditions. Play areas and learning tools include toys, games, and stories from different cultural traditions. Expand beyond local cultures—provide connections to others.

Make sure that the program's décor contains positive images of people of different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Pay attention to the details, incorporating cultural elements wherever possible. Post culturally appropriate artwork and posters on the walls; have diverse toys and storybooks in the childcare areas; and make sure that fabrics used for table cloths and furniture, dishes, implements for communal meals, musical instruments, and other objects used in program activities reflect the cultures of the families served. (Family Support America 1996, 59)

Try enlisting the help of the center's site committee or advisory group to decorate the center. This could be done as a pre-opening party, where community members bring things they feel would make the center more homelike and comfortable. After the center has opened, consider creating a more permanent decorating group to be responsible for periodic changes in decoration—hanging new photos, new children's art work, new decorations for upcoming holidays, and so on. If members are interested and have the time, they may also seek out donations for the center, either decorations or furniture.

For Participants' Safety and Comfort

Childproofing

In a safe setting, children can be allowed to explore freely with few restrictions and adult staff are relaxed and free to spend their time interacting positively with the children (The Children's Place 1985).

- Cover unused electric outlets with plastic plugs. Tape down loose electric cords to stop pulling, chewing, or tripping.
- Do not use slippery throw rugs. Mop up spills promptly, sweep up any loose materials (e.g., sand or cereal) that participants could slip on. Encourage parents to have their children wear nonskid foot wear; have extra sneakers in assorted sizes on hand for children who remove winter boots and begin playing in stocking feet.
- Make sure that the family support center complies with basic fire and life safety codes. You can obtain copies of such codes through local fire department officials or building inspectors.
- Enclose exposed radiators and steam and hot water pipes.
- Use only shatterproof mirrors. Keep any breakable drinking cups and snack plates out of children's reach; if possible, use only plastic ones that will not break.
- Keep plants well out of children's reach, so they do not eat the leaves or accidentally pull plants down onto themselves; do not use any houseplants with poisonous parts (if in doubt call the nearest poison control center).
- Since all furniture is potential climbing equipment, use only stable pieces. Keep toy shelves low, and place heaviest toys on lowest shelves.
- Keep potentially hazardous materials, cleaning supplies, plastic bags, adult medicines, and cosmetics under lock and key.
- Determine what kind of paint was used in your center to assure the absence of a hazardous quantity of lead. Old buildings may be dangerous. Be sure to check for lead contamination. The local public health department can be contacted to provide information on lead poisoning and to detect hazardous quantities of lead in the facility.
- Make sure that there is no exposed fiberglass insulation or asbestos-insulated pipes.
- Check toys and equipment frequently for sharp, broken edges and for broken pieces small enough to swallow, and check riding toys for broken wheels. Pick up toys in pathways where children might trip on them.
- Wash toys and equipment regularly with bacteria-killing soap, and replace play dough weekly to cut down on germ transmission.
- Provide adult supervision around activities and equipment that require it, e.g., climbing and balancing equipment, toddler gym, craft activities.

Don't Forget the Bathrooms!

Family support centers should not overlook the bathrooms as part of their space design efforts. Installing changing tables in women's and men's bathrooms that are at a wheelchair-accessible height is an important consideration. Also, installing baby seats on the inside of bathroom stalls may improve comfort.

- Do not allow children to bring their own toys.
- Do not permit children to chew gum, and have them sit quietly during snack times to prevent choking accidents.
- Do not allow adults to place drinks such as coffee on the floor or to smoke around the children.
- Keep a well-stocked first-aid kit handy. If possible, have a full-time paid staff member who is trained in current first-aid procedures available at all times that the center is open.
- Tell parents about any medical situation or injury, no matter how slight. A bloody nose, vomiting, accident, high temperature, or bee sting becomes 100 percent more serious if the child tells his or her parents before you do.
- Keep fire extinguishers handy and visible, and plan and post fire emergency evacuation procedures. Practice fire drills with the children, so that if a fire should occur, they have an idea of what they need to do.
- Keep a list of emergency telephone numbers by the phone: fire, police, and rescue or ambulance services.
- Each child's registration card should contain information such as name, age, special needs, and pediatrician's phone number. Information about allergies and drug reactions or sensitivities should be posted as soon as the child enters the center.
- Design access routes to exit doors so that children cannot get out easily by themselves; make sure exits are visible to adults.
- Do not permit a child to leave the center with anyone except the parent who brought the child or a person whom that parent has authorized in writing in advance.
- Install children's equipment and furniture, such as toilets, cabinets, and sinks, at a child's level.

Elderly Participants

If your program has many elderly participants, you may want to consider the following changes to accommodate their age and possible disability. Many centers struggle to meet this group's needs, since accommodations may be expensive. However, the following suggestions can help these participants move more freely and safely within the center (Wexler 1998):

- Install wide, 36-inch doorways (rather than the standard 28- to 32-inch ones) to allow passage of wheelchairs.
- Use lever-handled doorknobs to make opening doors easier for those with arthritis and less dexterity in their joints.
- Use windows with levers or cranks for easy opening by those with less strength and leverage.
- Install a thermostat that can be read and operated easily.
- Utilize single-lever faucets that don't require grasping or twisting, and an antiscald hot-water valve on sinks, again to aid seniors in dealing with loss of dexterity and rapid movement.
- Have a wider-than-usual stairway leading to any additional levels, with 11-inch treads (instead of the traditional nine inches) that allow a person's foot to rest solidly on each step.
- Locate colored accents around any countertops so that people can see the edges readily, and have under-counter open space that can accommodate a wheelchair.
- Make sure kitchen cabinets are fitted with levers so that top shelves can be lowered for easy access.
- Have a side-swinging door on the wall oven that makes it easy to remove food.
- If there is a dishwasher, install it up to a foot above the floor so that bending is minimized.

Maintenance and Cleaning

Many supplies are necessary for maintenance activities, which include dusting, changing light bulbs, washing windows, defrosting the refrigerator, general cleaning, mowing and weeding the lawn, and removing snow. In addition, occasional repairs are needed, such as fixing a faucet or reshingling the roof. These activities help the center remain a healthy, safe, and aesthetically pleasing place for staff and families. The following seven principles can aid the center in keeping maintenance costs low.

Simplify

Spaces should contain only the furniture and equipment that is necessary for the activities that will take place there. Reduce unnecessary surfaces such as open shelves, ledges, or tabletops that accumulate nonessential material and dust. Wherever possible, extend wall-mounted cabinets to the ceiling with enclosed shelves to hold less frequently used items.

Use Camouflage

Select surfaces that have a small pattern so that blemishes do not show up dramatically. For example, lightly patterned vinyl flooring hides small amounts of crumbs and stains until the next cleaning, whereas a solid dark colored carpet needs frequent vacuuming to look presentable.

Concentrate

If possible, concentrate the very messy operations in one area with cleaning supplies and equipment stored nearby.

Plan Convenience

If it is convenient to put things away, people are more likely to do so. Organize storage and recycle bins at the point of use. Toys and craft materials are more likely to be put away if child-accessible storage is close by. At entrances, have large and dry surfaces where people can clean their shoes and boots when they come in.

Avoid High-Maintenance Materials

The surfaces and objects that get used the most should have maintenance-free finishes and designs. Consider using washable paint when repainting walls or surfaces.

Reduce the Variety of Surfaces

Using fewer kinds of material reduces the need for different kinds of cleaning equipment and supplies and shortens the time required for cleaning.

Use Compatible Equipment

Sticking to one manufacturer for each type of equipment (whether faucets, computers, or play equipment) simplifies the process of maintenance and requires fewer tools and spare parts to be on hand.

Build Relationships with Suppliers of Building and Maintenance Materials

Consider bartering your center services for free or discounted access to their supplies.

When planning for cleaning and maintenance, be sure to allot resources in your budget and in your staff members' schedules. One family support center director commented that doing this while still in the planning stage is critical. "I didn't realize how much time it would take; I may have to hire someone to come in and help with the cleaning now." If the center is occupying space within a larger institution (i.e., a school), janitorial services may be provided. Be sure to explore all your options before settling on one.

One author offers the following suggestions for cleaning a day care center (Gallagher 1994):

- To reduce the spread of germs, air your rooms daily, use disposable diapers, and wash your hands after changing babies and before serving meals.
- Disinfect the changing areas, toys, and play equipment with a sanitizing solution and spray at the end of each day to reduce the spread of germs.

For information on diapering procedures that minimize contamination of children, caregivers, surfaces, and objects in a childcare program, see the American Academy of Pediatrics, *1991 Red Book: Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*.

Worksheet 1: Specific Program Spatial Needs

Complete a copy of this worksheet for each program that your center offers.

Program: ______

Number of people expected to participate: ______

Program participants are:

- ☐ infants and young children (0–7)
- ☐ older children (8–12)
- ☐ youths/teenagers (13–18)
- ☐ adults (18+)
- ☐ older adults (depending on their physical condition)

Program is likely to include:

- ☐ persons with larger bodies
- ☐ persons with small bodies
- ☐ persons who may want to be very active
- ☐ persons whose activities are limited by disabilities, age, or other circumstances

Activities included in the program:

The program necessitates space for

- ☐ physically active persons
- ☐ quiet activities
- ☐ private conversations

Space will be shared by entire families or often groups of persons of diverse ages and needs

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

What are the particular spatial and design needs given this shared space?

Outdoor activities are part of this program (See **Worksheet 5** for a checklist to evaluate outdoor play space.)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

Describe any state regulations affecting the amount of space required per participant.

Describe equipment that must be stored. (See **Worksheet 4** for specific storage space considerations.)

How can programs be scheduled to maximize use of space and participants' scheduling needs? (See **Worksheet 3**. Make copies so that different scheduling options may be explored.)

How can programs be scheduled realistically, to maximize use of space and participants' scheduling needs?

Worksheet 2: Program Space Needs Grid

In the left column, list the programs or activities the center plans on offering. Consider the spatial needs in the next columns, checking the appropriate column(s). After doing this for all potential programs or activities, consider how the space needs of different programs overlap.

Programs or Activities	**Types of Space Needed**				
	Large Open Space (up to 50 people participating)	*Classroom size* (up to 15 people participating)	*One-on-One Space*	*Small Meeting Space* (five to six people participating)	*Outdoor Space*

Worksheet 3: Schedule of Activities and Programs

Record preferences for scheduling an entire month of programs and activities. Make copies of the blank worksheet so that you can experiment with different scheduling options.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Worksheet 4: Overall Site Assessment

This worksheet can be used both to compare different site options and to assess a given space.

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Comments
ACCESSIBILITY					
1. Route from road to main entrance and main entrance itself are 32 inches wide					
2. Main door has automatic opener					
3. Reachable on foot/bicycle					
4. Required ramps maximum 1:12 slope, with raised lip or handrails					
5. Accessible for strollers					
6. Secure, free automobile parking day and evening, including handicapped parking					
7. Entrance protected from snow and ice					
8. Other:					
AESTHETICS					
1. Architectural style					
2. Compatibility with community					
3. Other:					
AIR QUALITY					
1. Air exchange					
2. Humidity					
3. Temperature control					
4. Draftiness					
5. Other:					
LAYOUT/FLOOR SPACE (note room dimensions where appropriate)					
1. All on one level					
2. Drop-in/children's play area					
3. Adult programming area					
4. Youth programming area					
5. Library area(s)					
6. Bulletin board to display community resource information at a maximum height of 54 inches					
7. Office or offices					
8. Staff/administrative space for computers, copiers, faxes, etc					
9. Space for staff (including secure space for personal belongings)					

Adapted from Chen and MacAulay, *Improving Facilities*, 1999

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Comments
10. Entrance/coat area at least 60 inches by 60 inches					
11. Loading/drop-off area					
12. Washroom facilities for men, women, and children (accessible to those with disabilities)					
13. Diaper changing areas					
14. Small meeting rooms					
15. Large meeting room					
16. Food preparation area					
17. Kitchen appliances: stove, refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher					
18. Eating area for program participants					
19. Eating area/private space for staff					
20. Outdoor play space (shade? sun? accessible route? See Worksheet 2 for more assessment criteria)					
21. Outdoor play structure					
22. Ability to close off private space					
23. Sinks near craft area, toy storage, food preparation area					
24. Utility sink for heavy cleaning					
25. Laundry facilities					
26. Other:					
LIGHTING					
1. Natural light					
2. Adjustable area lighting					
3. Lighting fixtures (no flicker, full spectrum light)					
4. Window coverings					
5. Other					
LOCATION					
1. Close to a major road					
2. Near public transportation					
3. Near places where families that use the program live, shop, work, play					
4. Visible in the community					
5. Near other complementary services such as school, day care, library, health clinic					
6. Close to grocery store (for supplies)					

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	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Comments
7. In area comfortable for families of all incomes					
8. Near fire hydrant					
9. Other					
MAINTENANCE/UPKEEP (evaluate current state, degree of improvements needed, and maintenance needed over time)					
1. Exterior finishes (if applicable)					
2. Interior wall finishes (plant, wallboard, tile, etc.)					
3. Interior floor finishes (carpeting, tiles, linoleum, wood, etc.)					
4. Interior ceiling finishes					
5. Roof					
6. Windows					
7. Outside pathways					
8. Outside play equipment and space					
9. General level of repair					
10. Landscaping, gardens					
11. Garbage collection					
12. Snow removal, including accessible outdoor routes					
13. Utilities cost					
14. Cleaning cost					
15. Other:					
PLUMBING, ELECTRICAL & OTHER SYSTEMS					
1. Wiring and electric capacity					
2. Heating and cooling systems					
3. Placement and number of outlets					
4. Plumbing (pipes, fixtures, drains)					
5. Telephone jacks					
6. Computer/on-line access					
7. Intercom					
8. Visible and audible fire alarm					
9. Flashing and audible smoke detectors					
10. Sprinkler system					
11. Carbon monoxide detector					
12. Other:					
SECURITY					
1. General safety of neighborhood, street, building, including night time					
2. Visibility of all access points					
3. Quality/location of windows and doors to discourage break-ins					
4. Alarm system with visible and audible cues					

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Comments
5. Fire evacuation plan that addresses those with visual, hearing, and physical disabilities					
6. Other					
STORAGE					
1. Kitchen storage for food, coffee, etc					
2. Kitchen storage for dishes, cutlery					
3. Kitchen storage for cooking equipment					
4. Kitchen storage, general					
5. Kitchen storage for brooms and dustpans					
5. Storage for toys and/or toy library					
6. Storage for craft supplies					
7. Storage for extra play equipment such as riding toys, water table					
8. Storage for seasonal equipment such as wading pools, holiday decorations					
9. Storage for audio-visual equipment, flip charts, etc					
10. Storage for cleaning supplies, and equipment, such as mops, vacuum, tools, ladder, etc					
11. Storage for office supplies, stationary					
12. Storage for other items, such as computer boxes, extra chairs, folding walls or screens, etc					
13. Secured storage for staff's personal items					
14. Storage for archived records					
15. Storage for garbage and trash waiting for collection					
16. Other					
TOTAL					

SCORE					**SCORE TOTAL**	
	x –2	x –1	x 1	x 2		

Scoring: To calculate a score for each facility, add up the number of check marks in each column and record totals in the boxes to the right of the word "total" on this page. Multiply the number in the first column by -2 (very poor), the number in the second column by -1 (poor), the number in the third column by +1 (good), and the number in the fourth column by +2 (very good).

Example: For one facility, the column totals looked like this: 16, 21, 52, 11. The score would be:
(16 x -2) + (21 x -1) + (52 x 1) + (11 x 2) = -32 + -21 + 52 + 22 = 21
Remember, the items on the checklist are not *equally important*, so this score is only a very rough basis for comparison. You may prefer to calculate and compare separately the scores for individual sections such as location, accessibility, layout, etc. Respective sections are more or less important to different centers serving different populations.

Worksheet 5: Outdoor Play Space Assessment

This worksheet can be used both to asses existing outdoor play space and to evaluate possibilities in preparing a new outdoor play space.

GENERAL SITE	YES	NO
Is the play area separated from parking areas? Comments	☐	☐
Is there a safe route to the play area from the sidewalk that includes crosswalks and/or traffic lights, if they are needed? Comments	☐	☐
Does the route to the play area from the sidewalk include slopes from curbs (for the safety of people who use wheelchairs and strollers)? Comments	☐	☐
Are there hard-surfaced pathways that are free of roots, holes, and cracks that could cause tripping? Comments	☐	☐
Is there a place for storing bicycles away from the walkways? Comments	☐	☐
Is the play area visible from surrounding areas (streets, neighborhood, etc.)? Comments	☐	☐
Is the play area free of poisonous and hazardous (pointed or thorny) plants? Comments	☐	☐
Is the play area free of debris such as wood splinters, broken glass, sharp stones, and feces? Comments	☐	☐

From Chen and MacAulay, *Improving Facilities*, 1999.

GENERAL SITE	YES	NO
Are there separate play areas for preschoolers and school-age children? Comments	☐	☐
Are the running and jumping areas separate from quiet play areas? Comments	☐	☐
Are the slopes of ramps for use by people using wheelchairs not steeper than 1:12 (a rise of one foot over a length of 12 feet)? Comments	☐	☐
Are there protective edges or handrails on both sides of all ramps? Comments	☐	☐
Is there a shared area in which to sit? Comments	☐	☐

PLAY COMPONENTS	YES	NO
Are all areas of the play components easily visible? Comments	☐	☐
Can adults access all areas of the play components (to reach and assist children)? Comments	☐	☐
Is there at least one easy means of access to and from each piece of equipment? Comments	☐	☐
Is moving equipment such as swings separated from other play areas? Comments	☐	☐

PLAY COMPONENTS	YES	NO
Are painted surfaces free of chips and rust? Comments	☐	☐
Are protective panels provided on all elevated play platforms? Comments	☐	☐
Are changes in level (e.g., steps) marked with contrasting colors? Comments	☐	☐
Are play components scaled appropriately for the sizes of the age groups for which they are intended? Comments	☐	☐
Are play components free of areas in which children could get their heads trapped? Comments	☐	☐
Are wooden posts and beams free of cracks over 1/2 inch wide and visible decay? Comments	☐	☐
Are spring toys designed so that when bent to the maximum extent they do not pinch hands or feet? Comments	☐	☐
Are handrails or handholds provided at all changes in grade? Comments	☐	☐
Can all handrails be grasped by hands that are small (a diameter of 1" to 1?")? Comments	☐	☐

PLAY COMPONENTS	YES	NO
Are all components free of sharp or rough points or edges? Comments:	☐	☐
Are fastening devices (e.g., bolts) free of sharp or protruding edges? Comments	☐	☐
Are play components free of open "S" hooks or catch points (commonly found at the top of swings or slides) that could snag clothing, scarves, or hood strings? Comments	☐	☐
If the surface of the slide is metal, is it facing north or is it shaded? Comments	☐	☐
Are side walls that are at least 4" high provided on both sides of the slide? Comments	☐	☐
Is there a run-out at the bottom of the slide to stop or slow a child's movement before he or she dismounts the slide? Comments	☐	☐

Worksheet 6: Is Our Space Family-Supportive?

	Yes / No	How do we know?
1. The site has flexible operating hours to reflect the needs and employment and/or education schedules of families being served.		
2. The center and its environment are		
a. inviting and comfortable		
b. properly childproofed		
c. clean and well maintained		
3. The center includes		
a. space for parents to gather informally		
b. group meeting space		
c. a place to prepare and eat meals		
d. a private area for confidential discussions		
e. a play/activity area for children		
f. an area in which children and their parents can participate in activities together		
g. accommodations required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)		
h. adequate work space for staff		
i. a secure filing space		
j. a welcoming reception area		
k. changing tables		
4. The center meets all local, state, and federal licensing, insurance, and safety standards.		
5. Families are involved in the design and decoration of the center.		
6. The center's decor, including photos and art on the walls, reflects the culture or cultures of the community it serves.		
7. The children's activity area is arranged in learning centers that		
a. allow children to make choices		
b. encourage cooperative social interaction		
c. capitalize on children's individual interests		
d. are appropriate for a wide range of developmental capabilities		
e. are cleaned and sanitized according to a regular schedule		

Adapted from: N. Ahsan and L. Cramer (1998) *How Are We Doing? A Program Self-Assessment Toolkit for the Family Support Field*

Resources

Publications

Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs
By J. Levine, D. Murphy, and S. Wilson. 1993. New York: Scholastica.

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By J. Vergeront. 1987. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

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By S. Kritchevsky, E. Prescott, and L. Walling. 1977. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

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Chapter 10

Budgeting and Financial Management

Budgeting and Financial Management

A strong budget and a financial plan are essential tools for effective work. Family support philosophy calls for many stakeholders' involvement in all operations of a family resource center, which also makes finance more challenging. As such, finance materials need to be presented in formats that many different groups can understand and reviewed in a way that maximizes participation. In this chapter we describe some simple procedures and strategies for

- creating a start-up budget
- revising your budget over time
- ongoing financial management

While the foundations for budgeting and financial management are described here, these processes are constantly evolving, not as cut-and-dry as they often seem in texts. Financial planning and management are subject to pressures from stakeholders, the utilization (or lack thereof) of certain center activities, political and social events (e.g., the passage of welfare reform legislation) and the day-to-day, often unpredictable demands placed on center staff and resources.

A word of caution: There are very specific accounting standards that affect how one may create and maintain financial records. This chapter provides a beginning point for budgeting processes, but you will need to refer to other sources to ensure your center's budget and financial records are in compliance with general accounting standards. The information presented in this chapter is mainly geared toward private nonprofit centers, though much of it may be applicable to public or for-profit organizations as well. If your center is a public or for-profit agency, further research will be necessary regarding budgeting and accounting standards. See the "Resources" section at the end of this chapter to learn where to turn to get such information.

Budgeting

Definition of a Budget

A *budget* details the expenses and revenue that support the activities of a program or agency. The creation of your budget should flow from the strategic planning process, in which priorities of your family resource center are set by the community rather than by funders or the ease of acquiring money for a certain program type. Usually, the budget is developed for a 12-month period, beginning with the start of the fiscal year for the organization. A budget consists of your best estimate of

- how funds will be spent
- how much money will be raised
- where the money to operate the center will come from

It functions both as a planning and as a financial management tool during the year.

Creating an Inclusive Planning Process

Family support practice requires the sharing of power and the involvement of community members in all aspects of program activities, including planning, governance, and administration. Family support centers should be participant-driven, and thus the budgeting process should be inclusive of a variety of stakeholders.

Who to Involve

When creating a start-up budget, the center director and board of directors should call upon the members of the center's strategic planning team to gain community members' input on priorities. (For more information on the strategic planning team, see chapter 2). The strategic planning team, having participated in the strategic planning process, is already engaged with the family support initiative and brings relevant skills and knowledge of community priorities. They can help to ensure that the center's budget reflects a commitment to achieving the outcomes that came out of the strategic planning process. Centers can also use input from the target population of the center to shape the budget development process. By incorporating input from those who will be using the center services you can help to ensure that the proposed budget reflects a service structure that can really help to meet their needs.

In the annual budgeting process, opportunities for providing input in the budget should be available on two levels. First, persons at the partnership level (i.e., those on the board of directors) should have access to all figures and a direct voice in the decision-making process. Second, persons at the advisory level (i.e., staff members or program participants) should be able to provide input on community priorities. Persons involved at this level do not need to work directly with allocations for individual line items. Certain allocation should be kept private, such as individual staff members' salaries. (For more on participants' roles in the center, see chapter 15.)

Frontline and supervisory staff should be included as resources for drafting budgets. Staff members bring day-to-day experience with the financial and programmatic needs of the center. They also have a good idea of what is working in the center and what still needs to be provided to make the center perform optimally. Involving staff members in the budgeting process helps them to stay informed about the growth and direction of the center. Individual programs, departments, or services might have their own budgets that fit within the overall center's budget. (See "Budgeting Levels" later in this chapter.) This structure may allow subgroups within the center's staff to have some flexibility on how funds are created and to be responsible for working within their budgets.

Program participants should regularly be called upon during the budgeting process throughout the center's life. Like the staff, participants deal with family support centers' financial allocation decisions on a daily basis. They have valuable ideas on program spending and practices that may go unnoticed by staff and management. In addition, parents should be involved in setting the priorities of the organization. If parents and family members are already part of the center's governance structure, this involvement is required. Parents outside this structure should also have a say, at least in an advisory capacity, and be involved in priority setting.

Participants involved in the budgeting process (e.g., board members) may not have a background in nonprofit financial matters. Family support centers should consider training to provide potential participants with a common vocabulary and a basic understanding of budgeting and nonprofit financial requirements. For persons wishing to be involved in an advisory level, your center may wish to create a structure such as a budgeting advisory committee to formalize their involvement. Such a committee could meet throughout the year, with the center's financial officer(s) reporting to them. They may need to meet more frequently while the budget is formed for a new fiscal year. (For more information, see "Budget Review through Program Examination" below).

Budget Functions

Budgets have three major functions, all of which need to be attended to for the family support center to be both effective and accountable at all budgeting levels. (Kettner, Martin, and Moroney 1990, 179–188)

- **Management:** Maintaining fiscal accountability is a key function of the budgeting process. Budgets show if spending is on-track for each program component, if resources need to be moved around to better meet the needs of each program component, and if some programs need to be expanded or cut back to better meet program goals and objectives. Management functions of a budget are concerned with *efficiency* in the allocation and spending of resources. For management purposes, budgets show the relationship between expenditures and services/products of the agency.

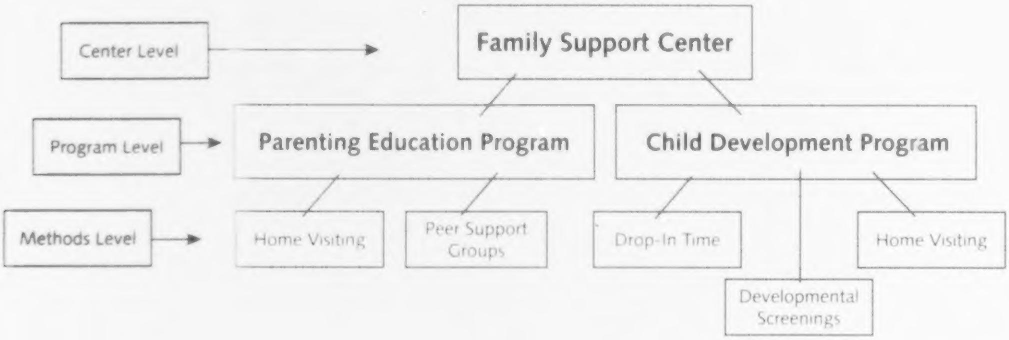
- **Control:** Budgets help you ensure that overspending does not occur, and that the agency remains in good faith with its funding agreements. The control function assures *accountability* by showing the relationship between the acquisition of resources and agency expenditures based on agreements with funders. It also ensures that money is spent in a manner consistent with what was proposed in the strategic planning process.

- **Planning:** Budgets are one of the concrete ways in which family support centers implement their mission, goals, and larger strategic plans. The budget ideally is a tool that connects resources (funds), services, and specific expected outcomes. The annual budgeting process is really about planning—making tough choices about how to allocate resources among different services. For planning purposes, budgets are used to monitor the relationship between agency expenditures and the achievement of objectives. The following information needs to be explicitly integrated into the budgeting process: the agency's mission and goals, the expectations of funders, the mission and goals of individual programs, and any evaluation data on programs.

Too often, budgeting and fundraising processes do not have an explicit connection to overall program or agency planning process, weakening centers' ability to connect their funding and budgeting activities to the broader programmatic goals and objectives. A focus merely on inputs and allocation decisions without sufficient attention to outputs and outcomes puts the agency in jeopardy when it comes time to be accountable to funders. As such, connecting all parts of the agency system in the budget format is a necessary step to ensure maximum efficiency and accountability. (See the "Summary Budget" section later in this chapter.)

Budgeting Levels

Budgets can be formed for a variety of programmatic levels, ranging from a methods level (e.g., home visiting services), to a program level (e.g., a parenting education program), to the entire center or agency level (e.g., the family support center).


Center Level
Family Support Center
Program Level
Parenting Education Program
Child Development Program
Methods Level
Home Visiting
Peer Support Groups
Drop-In Time
Home Visiting
Developmental Screenings

This chapter focuses on the center (agency) and program levels.

Budget Formats

There are many ways to structure your budget information. When reviewing overall agency expenditures and revenue, some form of a *summary budget* most often will suffice. To monitor agency or program financial oversight and management, a *line-item budget* is more useful. Following are descriptions of each.

Summary Budget

The summary budget is a shorter, less detailed form, and it may be more easily used to introduce funders and others to the center's programming and budget. This format may be thought of as a simpler form of the agency line-item budget. Because family support centers usually are complex and have multiple programs and methods, a summary budget is a key tool for helping the public and other stakeholders understand allocations across programs, explicitly tying funding to the program's or agency's goals and objectives.

Below is an example of a summary budget for an entire agency (adapted from Georgia Academy 1997, 111). Some lengthy details have been omitted. Attention is paid both to the resources flowing through the system and to the objectives to be met by programs. Funding is connected to the expected agency methods and program outcomes. Resources are also allocated to the administrative functions that may not necessarily fit in any program component. A blank summary budget is provided at the end of this chapter as Worksheet 1.

PART I. Budget Message (Center Level) (This portion indicates only a template for information.)

A. Agency description
- Overall mission and goals
- Target audience and actual participants (for the center and individual programs)
- Short description of programs and their correspondence with overall agency mission

B. Management description
- How will the center and your programs be monitored and managed? (Consider creating an organizational chart.)

C. Evaluation description
- How will the center monitor its progress toward its goals and objectives for individual programs and for the center as a whole?

D. Previous year's successes and challenges *(If this is not your first year of operation.)*
- Successes
- Challenges, unusual experiences
- Explanations if goals or objectives were not met in the previous year

PART II. The Elements of Each Program (Program/Methods Level)

Program: School Readiness

Goal: To improve children's readiness for school.

Target group: Children two to five years old at or below 150% federal poverty line in the Lakeview neighborhood

Benchmark objectives:
- Over the course of the next three months, 30 parents will be provided with parent education classes on the transition to school.
- By the end of the academic year, 100 families will be provided with books and family activities in parent/child reading.
- Upon completion of the program, 70% of participants will have improved their scores on a prekindergarten readiness test by 10%.
- Within four months of the start of the program, 60% of participants will have demonstrated familiarity and comfort with books.

Strategies: (describe methods used within the program)

Materials needed: Books, food, videos, chalkboard, chalk erasers, flyers, computers, etc.

Staff/hours needed: 40 hours a week (education specialist); 20 hours a week (teacher's aide)

PART III. Projected Income for the Budget Year (Center Level)

Grant from: Child Health Inc.	$35,000.00
Grant from: Ready-to-Learn Foundation	15,000.00
Contract with: West Bank	*12,000.00*
Contract with: State child welfare agency	72,000.00
Contributions from: Public and in-kind	*46,000.00*
Client Fees	*15,000.00*
Total Expected Income	**$195,000.00**

Note: Dollar figures for estimated funds are in italics. Secured funds are in regular font.

PART IV. Allocation for the Programs (Program Level)

Child development program	$50,000.00
Parent education program	48,000.00
Childcare	39,000.00
School readiness program	25,000.00
State-of-children report	7,800.00
Management/evaluation	25,200.00
Total Allocations for Budget Year	**$195,000.00**

Line-Item Budget

A line-item budget shows exactly how money will be spent. By itemizing the costs of all the needed resources for a program (or agency), line-item budgets help to predict the level of funding needed for each program or component. Line-item budgets support the management and control functions outlined earlier in this chapter. Line-item budgets provide the detail necessary to predict the level of funding needed for each program, and you can use them at either a program or agency level. Comparing a line-item budget to actual expenditures on a periodic basis (quarterly or even monthly) allows you to monitor

- whether spending is on-track
- whether spending on a program or component needs further control
- whether a program or component needs a larger allocation of funds
- whether funds directed toward one component may be better used in another

When creating a line-item budget at the program level, one must account for two different types of costs to the program: *direct expenses* and *indirect expenses*. Direct expenses are those that are directly associated with offering a program (e.g., transportation costs for home visits, the salaries of the home visitors, etc.). Indirect expenses are those costs that are required to operate the whole center but are divided evenly among different programs to be paid (e.g., the center's monthly rent, equipment used by multiple programs, or administrative costs such as accounting.) Indirect expenses are explored more later in this chapter as *overhead*.

Although more in-depth than the summary format, this format can vary in the detail presented depending on the intended audience. Some funders may require you to specify the particulars of every salary funded, while others may accept salaries presented in aggregate. As funders become more trusting or familiar with the program, they may accept more aggregate presentations of different expenses.

On the next page is an example of an agency-level line-item budget format. It does not include an exhaustive list of possible line items. A blank line-item budget is provided at the back of this chapter as Worksheet 2.

Anonymous Agency FY00 Line Item Budget

Revenues	
IDHS Title XX childcare services	$1,303,266
IDHS Title XX eligibility/add-on	$36,307
CDHS half-day Head Start	$280,414
CDHS collaboration full day	$165,073
CDHS home day care network	$689,943
State pre–K	$358,541
ISBE childcare food program	$125,000
IDHS quality enhancement	$120,000
CSBG youth/family	$94,000
Sinai Community Institute W2W	$68,171
IDHS Learn and Serve	$10,000
IDHS prevention/abstinence	$32,700
Work/family directions/Summer of Service	$50,130
Activity Fees	$2,500
Interest	$5,000
Funding Confirmed	
United Way	$75,336
MacArthur Foundation	$150,000
Steans Foundation	$110,000
Prince Charitable Trust	$25,000
Current Funding Renewal Presumed	
Freddie Mac Foundation	$125,000
Lloyd Fry Foundation	$80,000
Polk Brothers Foundation	$20,000
Chicago Community Trust	$100,000
Elinor Maynard Mark Family Fund	$30,000
Field Foundation	$15,000
Kaplan Foundation	$20,000
Chicago Tribune Charities	$15,000
White Foundation	$10,000
Northern Trust Foundation	$3,500
Corporations/Individuals	
Corporate contributions	$10,000
Matching gifts	$3,000
Individuals	$10,000
Special Events Fundraising	
Tag Day	$5,000
Misc. program events	$5,000
Dinner dance	$20,000
Candy	$15,000
To be raised/gap	$158,737
Total Revenue	$4,346,618

Expenses	
Personnel Expenses	
Wages	$2,613,803
FICA	$199,956
Health	$225,768
Worker's comp	$22,217
Unemployment	$17,833
Pension	$52,000
Subtotal Benefits	$517,774
Subtotal Personnel	$3,131,577

Other Expenses	
Foster grandparents	$14,000
Coverage	$500
Audit & accounting	$22,795
Contractual professional	$48,900
Stipends	$31,600
Contractors-providers FCC network	$363,473
Payroll service	$6000
Staff development	$68,158
Head Start medical/dental	$3,956
Head Start special needs	$16,606
Rent	$6,000
Storage	$1,000
Electricity	$14,000
Gas	$4,500
Telephone	$26,650
Water/sewer	$1,200
Scavenger	$6,000
Repair and maintenance property	$2,400
Office supplies	$26,000
Food	$126,900
Milk	$22,390
Maintenance supplies	$17,145
Kitchen supplies	$15,800
Program supplies	$153,312
Program transportation	$21,966
Staff/volunteer travel	$11,200
Computer equipment	$2,500
Equipment repair	$2,000
Equipment lease/rental	$8,447
Special events/activities	$57,125
Parent program	$4,125
Camp	$15,000
Board development/meetings	$2,500
Licenses	$900
Postage/messenger	$8 080
Printing	$7,400
Subscriptions	$3,100
Dues	$4,200
Insurance	$24,213
Depreciation	$30,000
Subtotal Other Expenses	$1,202,041
Subtotal Personnel and Other	$4,333,618

Fundraising Expenses	
Dinner Dance	$5,000
Candy	$7,500
Carnival	$500
Subtotal Fundraising	$13,000
Grand Total Expenses	$4,346,618
Difference to Revenue	

Narrative Description

Generally, a line-item budget is accompanied by a narrative description of the budget, including more detail on each line item. This narrative also includes justification for each of the expenses listed. Such information is often especially important when you are developing funding proposals. Possible expenses listed in this example are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a beginning reference point for budget planners. An example of such a narrative may include a justification of a cost that may at first glance seem too high or too low without background information:

- The seemingly high cost for consultants is necessary because the center is setting up a new management information system that will in the future ease program monitoring and improvement processes, cutting back on staff hours necessary to fulfill these functions.

Or a narrative may provide a further breakdown of a lump of expenses:

- Food: $5 per person per group meeting, 45 group meetings per year, seven people per group.

Creating a Start-Up Budget

As stated above, start-up budgets should flow from the strategic planning process and thus make use of the strategic planning team. This group of people should include potential participants in family support center planning, as well as people who are knowledgeable about the programmatic and outcome priorities of the target population. Just as the annual budgeting process should be inclusive, so should the start-up.

Creating the first budget for a new agency or program can be quite a daunting task. However, with a few systematic questions in mind, one can obtain a reasonable estimate of what resources will be needed. Start with the bottom line—the funding currently available to the center for programs and start up. Organize planning participants into brainstorming groups, where they will review plans and priorities for program activities—the steps needed to carry out the program's or agency's goals and objectives and achieve the desired outcomes. Write down *how* the activities or services will be carried out—how many staff hours and what materials are needed to do this—and the estimated cost for each.

If you have not already made priorities among your planned activities, prioritize the programs or activities according to which are more or less central to the achievement of you goals. If what you would like to offer costs more than what you can afford to offer, you should budget for the highest priority programs and activities. Set realistic allocations. A similarly sized organization with comparable allocations may be able to help with the estimation for a new center. If this is your first year of operation, overestimating expenses by a fair amount is the best approach. There are usually more expenses than expected.

Personnel

One of the biggest and most important parts of your budget (whether at the program or agency level) describes the resources allocated to staffing. After having reviewed the pros and cons of different staffing configurations (see chapter 8), consider more specifically the staffing needs of the center or program based on the programs and their strategies. (See Worksheet 5 at the end of this chapter.) Address such questions as the following:

- Given the activities and programs you want to offer, and how often and how long you want to offer them, how many full-time and/or part-time people will you need to work directly with families? What skills and knowledge will these different positions require (e.g., working with families, childcare, counseling, clerical, word processing, databases, spreadsheets, cooking, etc.)?
- How will volunteers be utilized?
- Do you need someone to answer the phone during all open hours, or to be in the center to greet visitors when you are open?
- Will you hire someone to be your accountant on a full-time, part-time, or a pro bono basis? Will you require services from a lawyer?
- What is a reasonable salary range for each position?

After the center's basic staffing needs have been outlined, conceptualize how different positions will function—will a person be employed primarily in one program? How much time will each position spend directly providing services versus maintaining records or completing administrative tasks? Many centers use the same people for different programs and allocate parts of their time to different funding streams. Based on a person's mix of tasks, as well as previous experience and education, calculate his or her base (or gross) salary. On the staffing budget, include formulas to explain how each figure is calculated.

For example, if two full-time and two part-time staff people are needed, the staff worksheet will read:

• 1 home visitor (1 FTE [full time equivalent])	@ $2,000/month	$24,000
• 1 parent/child activities coordinator (1 FTE)	@ $2,000/month	$24,000
• 1 half-time clerical (.5 FTE)	@ $700/month	$8,400
• 1 half-time childcare (.5 FTE)	@ $700/month	$8,400
	TOTAL PROGRAM SALARIES	$64,800

A *full-time equivalent* is usually between 37 and 40 hours a week of staff time. See your funders' guidelines for what should be considered a FTE within their grant. One FTE can be comprised of more than one staff member—for example, one half-time employee (20 hours a week) and another half-time employee (20 hours a week) together equal one full-time equivalent (FTE). FTE's are expressed in decimals, not percentages (.5 FTE, not 50% FTE). Programs often have more employees than they do FTE's, because each employee is not necessarily full-time. For example, one family support center could have six FTE, but seven employees:

MSW 1 =	1 FTE
MSW 2 =	1 FTE
Child development worker =	1 FTE
Group services worker =	1 FTE
Teacher =	.5 FTE
Home visitor =	.5 FTE
Receptionist =	.5 FTE
Cook =	.5 FTE

This is one employee splitting time between two positions

Generally, if a supervisor is doing work within a specific program, his or her time is charged to that program. If, however, that person is responsible for overall administration affecting more than one program, his or her time is classified as overhead. (This will be discussed below.)

Employee Name/Title	Gross Salary	Benefits Received	Each Cost	Total Benefits Cost	Benefits/Gross Salary
Marsha Boyd, home visitor	$24,000	Medical insurance Retirement package Disability	$5,000 $1,500 $700	$7,200	7,200/24,000 = 1/5 = 30%

Next, calculate the expenses of the *fringe benefits* that will be offered. This can include health and life insurance, dental insurance, retirement accounts, long-term disability insurance, etc. Start by looking at each employee, the benefits he or she will be offered, and the cost for each of those benefits for that person. Add each of these costs together, and the product is the total benefit costs for that employee. Divide the benefit cost by his or her salary, and the resulting figure is the percentage of his or her salary the fringe benefits are worth (this is a figure usually used in presentations to funders or potential employees). (More on employee benefits is available in chapter 8.)

Next calculate *payroll taxes*, i.e., Social Security and Medicare (i.e., FICA taxes), and state and local taxes. The taxes included in the personnel budget are the employer's contribution, since the employee's contribution is deducted from his or her gross salary. Since taxing rates and the maximum taxable level of income changes from year to year, consult with the IRS (www.irs.ustreas.gov) and your state's taxing agency (links are provided from the IRS site) to learn the current year's levels. Also talk to an accountant who has expertise in employee taxes.

Federal Taxes

You as an employer must withhold and deposit the employee's part of Social Security and Medicare taxes, and you must pay a matching amount. 501 (c)(3) organizations are exempt from contributing to FUTA (Federal Unemployment) taxes. However, you are responsible for SUTA (state unemployment) taxes. See Publication 15-A by the IRS for more information on taxable income, taxing rates and levels, as well as how to turn in taxes to the collecting agency.

So that you can have some idea as to how these taxes are calculated, 1999 will be used here as an example year. For 1999, the social security taxing rate was 6.20%, applicable to an employee's gross income up to $72,600. Any income above this level was exempt from this tax. Medicare taxing rates in 1999 were 1.45%, applicable to all an employee's salary. Employers in a 501(c)(3) organization are exempt from the Federal unemployment tax (FUTA) and Federal income tax. However, they must still withhold income taxes from their employees' salaries. These organizations are still liable for state unemployment taxes, determined at different levels in each state.

Employee A, even though her gross salary is $80,000, is taxed for social security only on the first $72,600.

In this example, the employer is only assessed state unemployment taxes against his employees' first $8000 of salary. (Not based on any particular state.)

	Gross Salary	Social Security Taxes (6.2%)	Medicare Taxes (1.45%)	SUTA (6%)
employee A	$80,000	$72,600 x .062= **$4501.20**	$80,000 x .0145= **$1,160.00**	$9,000 x .06= **$540**
employee B	$35,000	$35,000 x .062= **$2,170.00**	$35,000 x .0145= **$507.50**	$9,000 x .06= **$540**
TOTAL	**$115,000**	**$6,671.20**	**$1667.50**	**$1080**

This total is the amount of money the employer is expected to contribute. The amount that the employee should contribute is the same.

The SUTA tax example listed above is not based on a particular state or year. It is realistic, however, in the maximum level of salary taxed and the taxing rate. The rate a state charges an organization for SUTA taxes changes over time. New organizations are often assessed a higher rate, which is lowered if there are no or very few unemployment claims filed by employees of that organization over the course of a few years.

Finally, determine whether any *hourly employee services* or consultant fees will be paid for a specific activity. Programs may hire hourly consultants to help with any number of tasks, including improving management, board relations, evaluation, etc. This type of employee is useful when the center does not have the resources to hire such an employee full-time, or when the task is time-limited.

Position	Hours per week or month	$/Hour	Total Charges per Week or Month	Annual Costs
Evaluation Consultant	20 hours/month	$100/hour	$2,000/month	$12,000

As can be seen in the example above, it is important to include figures for hourly expense, monthly expense, and yearly expense. In this case, the hourly employee is only going to be kept on for 20 hours a month, for six months. Why this number of hours and number of months was chosen can be explained in the budget narrative (described above).

Combine all figures to arrive at **TOTAL PERSONNEL COSTS.**

Nonpersonnel Items

The remaining part of the budget will be comprised of all other expenses associated with running a center or program. While staff expenses are likely to be the largest item, other expenses will also be significant. Consider the following items:

- **Space/occupancy:** include rent, electricity, heating/air
- **Equipment:** copier, fax, computers, phone, furniture; consider both leasing and purchasing
- **Travel and transportation:** for staff travel
- **Phones/fax/on-line services/beepers/cell phones:** Estimate local and long distance, on-line, fax line, costs; expenses for buying beepers and cell phones, along with their monthly charges
- **Materials and supplies:** include program supplies, e.g., materials for home visits, parent child activities; office supplies, e.g., folders, paper, pens, ink, etc., as well as cleaning/housekeeping supplies, e.g., toilet paper, trash bags, paper goods
- **Postage:** estimate of postage
- **Printing:** for stationery, newsletters, brochure, etc.
- **Meetings, conferences:** registration expenses (hotel and travel expenses to be covered under "travel")
- **Insurance:** for space, program operations
- **Food:** for program activities
- **Participant Assistance:** travel, childcare, emergency assistance
- **Miscellaneous:** e.g., payroll processing costs

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When examining all these costs, consider how many of them can be acquired through in-kind donations or through volunteers. For example, can volunteers provide day care for participants while they are engaging in a mutual support group? Can local residents or other agencies donate furniture or books? This can have a positive impact on the budget by freeing up resources for other items. One staff member wrote, "Find out if any local school districts are planning to hold surplus furniture and equipment auctions. This is a great way to pick up extra tables, chairs, or audio-visual equipment. I once purchased a near perfect copier for $25. A friend of mine got an entire 300 piece set of wooden blocks for $50" (Gallagher 1994, 65).

Don't forget to consider replacement costs and utility rate increases when planning your budget. Equipment wears out, supplies are consumed, and phone, electric and water costs do not remain constant. Also, budget for any costs for remodeling, renovating, construction, alterations, and repairing of your location. How about the upkeep for the kitchen, bathroom, playroom, parking lot and laundry room? Would you like to add storage closets, shelves, carpeting, linoleum, additional lighting, improved ventilation, fire escapes, new asphalt for the parking lot and driveway, new heater, electrical wiring, bathroom fan or window, or new roof? In many states, fire safety laws dictate that all doors must open outward and be equipped with panic hardware. Are screens in place on each window? Exposed radiators will probably need to be enclosed for safety.

Administrative Overhead or Indirect Expenses

When budgeting at a program level, many expenses (e.g., rent or utilities which are incurred for the whole center, but are not easily directly attributable to a specific program. These expenses are usually shared between programs as *overhead*. In the agency budget, these expenses are given separate line-item status, since they are an expense directly associated with operating the entire agency. Exceptions to this general rule of thumb can arise if a particular program within an agency has its own site, or when an agency does not have multiple programs. Individual programs usually allocate about 10% of their budget toward these overall center expenses.

Calculating Your Indirect Expense Rate

Probably the easiest way to calculate administrative overhead is to add up all of your administrative expenses, divide by your total annual expenses, and multiply by 100. This should give you your center's overhead percentage rate. Specific expenses that are often included in overhead or indirect expenses include

- rent
- utilities
- office supplies
- furniture and equipment
- telecommunications (phone, fax, on-line access)
- postage and shipping
- staff development
- dues and subscriptions
- reception
- financial management
- administrative oversight and management staffing
- cleaning and maintenance

Remember, an expense that is only for one program or project, even if it falls into one of these categories, should be charged directly to that program or project rather than to the indirect line. So for example, the costs for monthly outreach mailings that include information on all center programs could reasonably be charged to indirect. The cost of mailing care packages to each new family receiving home visits would better appear as a direct line item in the budget under your home-visiting program.

Limits on Administrative Overhead

Funders generally want the majority of their money to support the delivery of direct services to families and not high administrative costs. Some funders even set a specific limit on what proportion of funds can be spent on administrative overhead or indirect costs. Always ask funders about their overhead or indirect policy before submitting a proposal. If the funder's allowable indirect rate is lower than your program's calculated indirect rates, there are a couple of solutions. First, try to move expenses out of the administrative total. Look at managers' time—consider hours they spend in staff supervision or staff training as programmatic staffing time and assign to the personnel line of a specific program. So for example, if your center director spends eight hours a week in direct supervision of childcare staff, you could charge 20% of his or her salary as a direct line item under the childcare section of the budget. Similarly looking at items like telephone, or postage, and breaking down which parts of them may be connected to specific programmatic activities can help.

If administrative or overhead expenses cannot be pared down to 10% or less of the budget, consider the reasons why this is so. Programs that are in start-up, program development, endowment development, or evaluation development mode may need more resources allocated to the administrative line item. Be prepared to justify this to funders who may have questions, and include this explanation in the budget narrative. Look to the National Charities Information Bureau (www.ncib.org) for guidelines on what charities look for in a proposal budget.

Matching Funds

Many funders also require those applying for money from them to demonstrate that the program is matching the funds being applied for with dollars from other sources. Finding matching funds generally helps to indicate the sustainability of the project and that there is other support for the proposed project of services. Finally, it sends the message to funders that there will be a greater impact for the dollars they are expending. Federal grants often specify that any required match must come from nonfederal sources. When being asked to demonstrate match it is generally easiest to create an additional column for match on a line-item budget and show, on an item by item basis, what other funding sources are contributing to the activity or expense. For example, if three separate funders are supporting your after-school activities, your line-item budget for this program would show, for each expense item, how much the specific funder is supporting, and in a match column, the total coming from the two other funders and other sources.

In-Kind Donations

One specific source of match is in-kind donations. For example, if a center is located in space donated by a school district, an approximation of what that donation is worth should be included in these records. Also, in-kind time donated by a lawyer or accountant would be kept here. Centers should remember to keep records of in-kind donations. Most often, agencies keep separate books for such noncash incoming resources. These records are important because they reveal the true cost of running the center. In addition, some funders may want to see records of such accruals as evidence of other sources of support. When a person or organization donates in-kind resources to the center, an IRS-approved receipt should be given to the donor for future tax credit purposes. See the IRS's web site at www.irs.ustreas.gov for further information.

Financial Management

Once your family support center has created its first year's budget, you should immediately start monitoring how resources flow through the center and its programs. An expenditure report is a comparison of the program's or center's projected budget with its actual expenses for budget oversight. This report can be prepared monthly or quarterly, depending on how often the program or its funder wishes to examine actual expenditures. It is very important to have a skilled person responsible for such oversight.

Keep in mind that some funds are granted for a 12-month period, which is not the same as the center's own fiscal year. For example, an agency may receive funding from a federal agency for the federal fiscal year from October 1 to September 30, while the agency may be on a calendar fiscal year from January 1 to December 30. Careful financial records are important both for management and for reporting back to the funder and the auditor. IRS laws require that funds be represented in the recipient's fiscal year they are received; however, sometimes the program's time frame for spending the funds extends across their fiscal year(s). It is important for the finance manager to have a good understanding of both the federal and state requirements, as well as the program's plan for allocating the funds.

Budgeting Processes

After the first year's budgeting process, subsequent years will allow the center more choices in budgeting and financial management processes (Herzlinger and Nitterhouse 1994, 287–296). One may decide that the previous year's goals and objectives, the methods for achieving them, and the budget for their costs was right on target in terms of allocating resources in an effective manner. In this case, one would use *incremental budgeting*. However, if one believes that the previous year's strategic plan was ineffective, *zero-based budgeting* would be the more appropriate approach. Both are described below.

Incremental Budgeting

Start with last year's budget and make changes incrementally. You could do this by

- analyzing the budget for a set number of programs in-depth per year
- examining only how new funds should be allocated
- examining how to allocate a decrease in money (if you have a decline in the funding available)

Incremental budgeting may also be based on an increase or decrease in demand for services, the ability to raise funds, and over- and underspending. Using an incremental process may be the easier budgeting process, but critics argue that it does not analyze every expenditure, program purpose, and method every year, which in the long run causes inefficiencies that could have been averted.

Zero-based Budgeting

Each year the organization must decide what types of programs to sponsor in its next fiscal year. This process takes into account how well different service strategies are meeting their goals and objectives, as well as how they individually contribute to the realization of the agency's goals and objectives. After the strategic plan has been modified and programming decisions have been clarified, the estimation process begins. This approach takes more time, but supporters argue that the end result is more responsible programming and resource allocation.

Because of time constraints and the complexity of analyzing all programs, most planning is incremental. It accepts the organization's present goals, strategies and plans. This process could be an across-the-board 5% increase for inflation, or an in-depth analysis of individual programs on a year-to-year rotating basis. Some agencies may at certain times take a zero-based approach and assess all programs in a certain year if there is an in-depth restructuring of the agency, or a change in its overall mission and goals.

Beginning the Process of Incremental Budgeting

Start by comparing the previous year's projected expenditures with the actual expenditures incurred in the year. The difference between the two figures should provide a baseline for estimating the necessary allocation amount for the upcoming year. For example, line 2 in the following table represents a situation in which expected expenses were higher than actual expenses. This could be due to a number of factors—perhaps there were not as many participants as expected. If that were the case, the next year's budget allocation should reflect the lower number. In line 3, actual expenses were greater than expected. Again, this could be due to a number of factors. Assume that this greater expense was due to a one-time expense—for example, the necessary replacement of some equipment. Since this investment will not be necessary again in the coming year, the lower budget figure is the more reliable one. Once the more reasonable figure is identified, adjust it to inflation. After adjusting previous budgetary items so they accurately reflect the needs in the upcoming year, one also will need to add any new program expenses expected (see last row of table). The "inflation index" for this expense is its projected costs.

Table 1: Incremental Budgeting

These estimations were correct

This estimation was too high: the actual expenditure is more reliable

Budgeted Amount	Actual Expenditure	Proposed Expenditure (Adjusted for Inflation)
$15,000	*$15,000*	$15,600
$20,000	$10,000	$10,400
$5,000	$15,000	$5,200
$5,000	*$5,000*	$5,200
$0	$0	$5,000

This estimation was too low, but it is more reliable because of a one-time expense.

This is a new program, so there were not previous estimations

For more information on how these budget figures are tied to fundraising efforts, see the next chapter, which is on fundraising.

Over-and Underestimating

Overestimating

Sometimes, due to unforeseen circumstances, family support centers are left with a surplus at the end of the fiscal year. If this occurs, contact the funder who supplied the surplus funds as soon as the overestimation is confirmed. Let the funder know your center made an overestimation, that you have surplus funds, and that you have a plan for how you may still serve the funder's original goals by using the funds in another way.

The first way you can propose to use the funds is to encumber them. That is, you can enter into agreements as to the expenditure of funds after the fiscal deadline originally set by the funder. You are in essence promising to expend this money in a certain way, although you have not actually incurred the expense yet. This requires contracts or invoices that demonstrate to the funder the funds have been committed.

The second way you can propose to use the funds is to reallocate them in a way that is in line with the funder's intentions when they originally funded you. For example, if you overestimated the expenses for drop-in childcare because you expected more families to request the service than did, you might negotiate with the funder to reallocate some of the unspent funds to an expanded outreach effort. The third way you could expend the funds is to propose carrying them over to the next fiscal year. This is often called a request for a no-cost extension. Generally, a request for a *no-cost extension* should include the following information: a rationale for why the funds were not expended in the agreed upon project time period, the exact amount of project funds that will be expended after the original agreed upon project end date, and an exact timeline for when those funds will be used and when an exact final report detailing how funds were expended will be submitted.

Tips for Financial Statements and Accounting

- The FASB (Financial Accounting Standards Board) of the Financial Accounting Foundation sets guidelines for how nonprofits (including family support centers) are to enter and maintain their financial data. Their manuals (especially No. 116 and No. 117) are very important for nonprofits to understand before they even begin to keep financial records.

- Keep in mind that financial statements will be closely examined by potential funders. Any large "jumps" in resource amounts from year to year (i.e., a large increase in unrestricted funds or a large decrease in government funding, whether or not they negatively affect the bottom line) will be questioned, so be prepared with an explanation.

- When examining potential software to be used by the center for accounting, be sure to check with other nonprofits to find out what has worked and not worked for them. Nonprofit management organizations on the Web often provide reviews of software packages. (See the "Resources" section at the end of this chapter.) Contact a local computer consultant to get any recommendations he or she may have for accounting software.

Underestimating

This is a more difficult problem to solve, but not impossible. Preventative measures, such as a monthly budget and financial statements, should be taken to avoid underestimating expenses. A monthly report will detect if a project is spending more money than expected. Once a deficit is detected, two possible remedies are available. The center may (a) cut back on a portion of the project, (b) move funds from another program or project (with permission of the appropriate funder), or (c) ask a funder to cover the extra costs.

For oversight during the fiscal year, setting budgeting benchmarks monthly helps you monitor expenses and identify wastes. Once your center is established, set benchmarks quarterly. Utilizing a monthly or quarterly expenditure report makes keeping track of spending for each funding source easier. First, establish a system to keep track of daily expenditures from each source. Second, collect the daily figures into a monthly summary, using a method that allows one to measure results from each specific grantor. The resulting budget accountability from this system helps maintain important relationships with funders, keep the organization task-oriented, and raise additional money. Monthly expenditure reporting allows one to show funders each project's progression. This is important in order to keep existing funds and raise future funds. A system of monthly budgeting also helps keep the organization on task. If any changes are needed in the budget because of cash influxes, down time, or a change in project timing, they can be made on a monthly basis. Monthly reviews enable the budget to be responsive to the center's specific needs.

Budget Review Through Program Examination

Budgeting involves more than allocating money to certain expenses. Budgeting is one of the means through which family support centers support the achievement of their mission and goals. As such, budgeting should involve an in-depth discussion about how funding relates to desired programmatic priorities, outcomes, and philosophies of the center. Whether one is budgeting at the agency level or at the program level, the summary level or line-item level, these discussions need to take place at regularly scheduled points in time. This dialog should take place while allocation is being debated and after one has a rough draft of the next year's budget. Discussions should take place among direct service staff, program administrators, and program participants.

Below is an example of the issues important to one group in a particular family support center. They decided it was important for stakeholders to guide how budgetary decisions should be reviewed. They used program participants, direct services staff, and program administrators in deciding issues to consider when reviewing the budget. They chose their programs committee to lead the process, thus signaling their belief that programming should drive the budget, not visa versa. The result was the following table, which is used by the center when budgetary decisions are made.

Example of Budgetary Decision Guidelines

CONSIDERATIONS	COMMENTS
MISSION—program furthers agency mission	
PROGRAM QUALITY—demonstrates best practices of family support	
UNIQUENESS of service (avoids duplication)	
LEVERAGE value (what are we learning, showing?)	
NUMBER of people served	
PARTICIPANT RETENTION	
NET DOLLAR COST—revenue less expense	
COST per participant/per family	
FUTURE REVENUE opportunities	
FUNDING stability/reliability	
FINANCIAL trends: is the program becoming self sufficient?	
OVERHEAD—financial contribution or drain	
POPULATION SERVED (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.)	
POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS—impact on community, impact on funding	
STAFF—investment, commitment, skill	
ETHICS—explicit promises/implicit promises	
HEADACHE FACTOR—how much "trouble" does the program create relative to its worth?	
PROGRAM LIFE CYCLE—is the program growing, thriving, declining?	
OUTCOME DATA—evidence of program effectiveness	
LOCATION—accessibility to persons with disabilities, community at large	
SOCIETAL TRENDS/PRIORITIES	
OTHER	

Family Focus Program Committee, Chicago, Ill. May 15, 1996

Worksheet 1: Summary Budget Worksheet

Make copies of this blank form to ensure enough space for all information.

PART I. Budget Message

A. Agency description

- What are your overall mission and goals?
- Who is your target audience? Who are your actual participants?
- How do your programs correspond with your mission?

B. Management description

- How will the center and its programs be monitored and managed? (Consider creating an organizational chart.)

C. Evaluation description

- How will the center monitor its progress toward its goals and objectives for individual programs and for the center as a whole?

If this is not your first year of operation...

D. Previous year's successes and challenges

PART II. The Elements of Each Program (Program / Methods Level)

- Goals:

- Target group:

- Benchmark objectives:

- Strategies:

- Materials needed:

- Staff/hours needed:

Part III. Projected Income for the Budget Year (Center Level)

Part IV. Allocation for the Programs (Program Level)

Worksheet 2: Sample Line-Item Budget

Make copies of this page and use it to estimate program expenses. You will need a spreadsheet to create a proper budget.

PROGRAM BUDGET:
Name of Program

	TOTAL	NOTES
REVENUES (List)		
TOTAL REVENUE		
DIRECT EXPENSES		
Staff Salaries		
Fringe benefits		
Mgt. expenses		
Consultants		
Supplies (list)		
Telecommunications		
Postage/delivery		
Printing		
Participant assistance		
Participant travel		
Local travel—staff		
Long-distance travel—staff		
Mtgs. & conferences		
Special projects		
Food		
Contingency (explain)		
Other (list)		
TOTAL DIRECT EXPENSES		
INDIRECT EXPENSES		
Equipment		
Overhead		
SURPLUS (DEFICIT)		

Worksheet 3: Staffing Issues

Make a copy of this worksheet for each program you intend to offer.

How many people/ families do we want to serve in this program?

Will they be served individually or in a group?

Given how long each activity takes (e.g., each home visit takes one hour), and how many people we want to serve, how many staff hours are necessary to fulfill these requirements? Include time for record keeping and travel (if applicable).

How many supervisor hours will be needed for each of the direct service staff? How should supervision time be made available to staff? (e.g., one hour private per week, one hour private once a month, one hour group supervision biweekly, only drop-in time, etc.)

What are appropriate salary ranges for each of these positions?

Do we need someone to always answer the phone?

- How many hours a week would this position(s) be staffed, given operating hours?

What kind of support staff will we need (e.g., cooks, administrative assistants, receptionists, etc.)?

- How many hours do these staff members need to be at the center?

- Do we need more than one person operating in this function at any given time?

Will we hire someone to be our accountant on a full-time, part-time or pro bono basis?
How many hours will we need a month?

- Will we require services from a lawyer? What are their fees? How many hours?

- Will we hire an evaluation consultant? What are their fees? How many hours?

- Will we hire any training consultants? What are their fees? How many hours?

Other Issues:

Worksheet 4: Nonpersonnel Expenses

Space/Occupancy

- How much is monthly rent?
- How much will monthly electricity bills be?
- How much will monthly heating/air conditioning costs be?

Equipment (consider both buying and leasing)

- copier
- fax machine
- computers, printers, scanners
- phone(s)
- furniture

Travel/Transportation—for staff travel (How many people? How many times a year?)

Telecommunications

- phones: estimate local and long distance monthly charges
- fax
- on-line services
- beepers—for field staff who might otherwise be difficult to contact (expenses for buying them, along with their monthly charges)
- cell phones—again, for field staff who might be difficult to contact otherwise, and for persons who may be working in dangerous environments (expenses for buying them, along with their monthly charges)

Materials and Supplies

- What program supplies will be needed for each program component (i.e., materials for home visits, parent/child activities)? How often will they need to be replenished?
- What office supplies will be needed for the whole center (i.e., folders, paper, pens, ink, etc.)? How often will they have to be replenished?
- What cleaning/housekeeping supplies will be needed for the whole center (i.e., toilet paper, trash bags, paper goods, etc.)? How often will they have to be replenished?

Postage—estimate of postage (Include any monthly mailings, announcements of special events, direct mail fundraising campaigns)

Printing

- stationery
-
- newsletters
- brochures (for what program components?)

Meetings, Conferences, Trainings—Registration expenses (hotel and travel expenses to be covered under "travel"). For training, explore bartering with other local agencies.

Insurance

- for the building
- for program operations (including insurance for the board of directors and program director, as well as the staff)

Food

- for program activities (Which activities? How often? For how many people?)
- for special celebrations (How often? For how many people?)

- for staff events (How often? For how many people?)

Participant Assistance

- travel—to the center, to other special events or conferences (How many people? How often?)
- childcare (How many children? How often?)
- emergency assistance—if a participant is dealing with an emergency and could use help

Miscellaneous (set aside some funds for expenses that have not been anticipated or for under-estimations)

Notes:

Worksheet 5: Personnel Tax Issues

Answer these questions to gain information you will need for your budget for personnel taxes.

Federal Taxes

Social Security

1. What is the cap for taxable income? ________
2. What is the taxing rate? ________
3. Is this tax also matched by the employee? ________

Medicare

1. What is the cap for taxable income? ________
2. What is the taxing rate? ________
3. Is this tax also matched by the employee? ________

State Taxes

SUTA (State Unemployment Taxes)

1. What is the cap for taxable income? ________
2. What is the taxing rate? ________
3. Is this tax also matched by the employee? ________

Other Taxes (To Be Contributed by Employer)

1. (name) ________________________________
Taxable income cap ________
Taxing rate ________
Matched by employee? ________

2. (name) ________________________________
Taxable income cap ________
Taxing rate ________
Matched by employee? ________

3. (name) ________________________________
Taxable income cap ________
Taxing rate ________
Matched by employee? ________

Worksheet 6: Calculating Your Contributions for Individual Taxes

Social Security Taxes

Taxable Salary x Taxing Rate =
$72,600 x .062

Example

Employee Name	Gross Salary	Taxable Salary	Taxing Rate	Tax Contribution
Marsha Boyd	$80,000	$72,600	6.2% (.062)	$4,501.20

TOTAL

Medicare Taxes

Example

Employee Name	Gross Salary	Taxable Salary	Taxing Rate	Tax Contribution
Marsha Boyd	$80,000	$80,000	1.45% (.0145)	$1160.00

TOTAL

SUTA

Example

Employee Name	Gross Salary	Taxable Salary	Taxing Rate	Tax Contribution
Marsha Boyd	$80,000	$9,000	6% (.06)	$540

TOTAL

Other Taxes 1

Employee Name	Gross Salary	Taxable Salary	Taxing Rate	Tax Contribution

TOTAL

Other Taxes 2

Employee Name	Gross Salary	Taxable Salary	Taxing Rate	Tax Contribution
			TOTAL	

Other Taxes 3

Employee Name	Gross Salary	Taxable Salary	Taxing Rate	Tax Contribution
			TOTAL	

Putting It All Together

Copy tax contribution amounts calculated on previous pages onto this page.

Fill in other taxes here.

Empoyee Name	Social Security Taxes	Medicare Taxes	SUTA Taxes				TOTAL
Marsha Boyd	$4501.20	$1160.00	$540				$6201.20
TOTAL							

Sum the taxes for each employee (add across)

Sum Social Security taxes for all employees (add all numbers in this column

Sum Medicare taxes for all employees (add all numbers in this column)

Sum SUTA taxes for all employees (add all numbers in this column)

Do the same with any other taxes.

Resources

Publications

Accounting and Financial Reporting for Voluntary Health and Welfare Organizations
1998. Washington, D.C.: The National Health Council.

Budgeting Basics & Beyond: A Complete Step-by-Step Guide for Nonfinancial Managers
By J. K. Shim and J. G. Siegel. 1994. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Press.

The Budget-Building Book for Nonprofits
By M. Dropkin and B. LaTouche. 1998. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Financial Management for Nonprofits
By J. K. Shim and J. G. Siegel. 1997. Irwin Professional Publishers.

Organizations

The Finance Project
1000 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/628-4200
Fax: 202/628-4205
www.financeproject.org

National Charities Information Bureau
19 Union Square West
New York, NY 10003
Phone: 212/929-6300
Fax: 212/463-7083
www.ncib.org

Nonprofit Financial Center
111 W. Washington Avenue, Suite 1221
Chicago, IL 60602
Phone: 312/606.8250
Fax: 312/606.0241
www.nonprofitfinancial.org/

Nonprofit GENIE
706 Mission Street, 5th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415/541-9000
Fax: 415-541-7708
www.genie.org/

Specific Standards and Guidelines

FASB Statement No. 116: Accounting for Contributions Received and Contributions Made (Issue Date: 6/93)

FASB Statement No. 117: Financial Statements of Not-for-Profit Organizations (Issue Date: 6/93)

Both FASB statements may be ordered from Financial Accounting Standards Board Web site at www.rutgers.edu/Accounting/raw/fasb/

Publication 15, Circular E, Employer's Tax Guide (revised every year).
Internal Revenue Service.

Publication 15-A, Employer's Supplemental Tax Guide (revised every year).
Supplementary information applicable to 501 (c)(3) organizations.

Both IRS publications may be downloaded from www.irs.ustreas.gov or may be ordered by calling 800/829-3676.

References

Gallagher, P. (1994) *So you want to open a profitable day care center: Everything you need to know to plan, organize and implement a successful program* (New York: Young Sparrow Press)

Georgia Academy (1997) *Planning for change* workbook (Atlanta, Ga.: Georgia Academy, Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families, and The Family Connection)

Herzlinger R., and Nitterhouse D. (1994) *Financial accounting and managerial control for non-profit organizations* (Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western Publishing Co.)

Kettner P., Martin L., and Moroney R. (1990) "Budgeting for planning, management, and control." In *Designing and managing programs* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications)

Chapter 11

Fundraising

Fundraising

Fundraising activities are a means to acquire funds for the center, a way to get the center's name out in the community, and a means for gaining in-kind resources such as volunteer time, furniture, and other supplies. When examining what resources the center will need, be sure to make use of all that the community has to offer.

There are many potential sources of funding available to family support centers. State, federal, and local agencies, foundations, corporations, service clubs, and individuals are willing and able to provide financial support for various programs, activities, events, and operating expenses. If a family support center receives adequate funding it can provide all potential programs. Receiving adequate funding requires creativity and diligence in the areas of planning, grant writing, and fundraising.

There are two great barriers to receiving financial support. The first is time. The second is resistance on the part of staff, board members, or the executive director to asking for financial and material assistance. Professional fundraisers know that the single greatest response to the question, "Why do you give?" is: "Because I was asked."

There are five steps to successful funding. First, through your institutional planning process, determine fundraising goals and develop a fundraising plan for the organization. Second, identify potential funders whose funding areas match your funding priorities. Third, develop your case and plan your approach. Fourth, write and submit a funding request. Finally, and most important, conduct follow up. Each time you go through this process, keep in mind that, even though you are doing the programmatic work every day, you are presenting new information for each prospective funder. It is crucial that your process is comprehensive and absolutely thorough.

Creating a Fundraising Plan

Determining Fundraising Needs and Setting Fundraising Goals

The fundraising process begins with setting monetary goals. Setting goals helps determine the kinds of funding sources to approach, how many sources are needed, and how long it will take to raise the money for funding all the projects. The center's annual fundraising goal depends on what types of activities are planned for the upcoming year, how much money it takes to staff the organization, and other expenses for the year. The goal should also provide an idea of how much money is already committed, from whom the money is coming, and where that money will be spent.

One way to conceptualize the necessary fundraising activities is to think in terms of the agency's budget. Look at the funds currently coming into the center, funding streams that will end with the fiscal year (or at some point in the coming fiscal year), and the programs and activities the center had planned in its budget. First, determine what the center's *secured funding base* is—that is, the amount of funding the center has already secured for the next fiscal year. Second, look at the difference between that total amount and the amount of money needed to maintain the agency as it operated in the previous fiscal year (adjusted for inflation). The difference between the two is *maintenance funding* needed by the center to continue business as usual—no cuts in programs or staff. Third, look at the new project or staff additions that the center wishes to make in the upcoming year. The amount of funding needed to finance these "dream" ventures is *growth funding*. Filling the center's maintenance funding needs is most pressing, although securing resources for growth funding is also important. One should be prepared for worst-case, middle-case, and best-case scenarios.

Below is a visual representation of the steps one goes through to estimate maintenance funding and growth funding for the next year. Also presented is the formula for determining what maintenance funding is necessary. The first three columns come directly from Table 1 in the "Budgeting Process" section of the previous chapter.

1. Secured Funding: Includes only guaranteed funding

2. Maintenance Funding: Needed to maintainall existing programs at current level

2. Growth Funding: Needed to expand services in desired ways additional staff, more materials, new programs, etc

A	B Previous Expected Expenses	C Previous Actual	D Expected Expenses with Inflation	E Secured Funding Needed	F Maintenance Funding Needed	G Growth Funding
Program 1	$15,000	$15,000	$15,600	$14,000	$1,600	$ 4,000
Program 2	$20,000	$10,000	$10,400	$10,000	$ 400	$ 2,000
Program 3	$ 5,000	$15,000	$ 5,200	$ 5,000	$ 200	$ 3,000
Program 4	$ 5,000	$ 5,000	$ 5,200	$ 5,000	$ 200	$ 2,000
Program 5	$0	$0	$ 5,000	$0	$5,000	$ 5,000
TOTAL			**$41,400**	**$34,000**	**$7,400**	**$16,000**

Expected expenses with inflation - Secured funding = Maintenance funding needed

Researching Funding Opportunities

Identifying Potential Funders

The adage, "People give to people" is true. Start with friends and contacts, board members, and others who are personally involved with the center. Develop relationships with local companies, service clubs, national corporations, and foundations. Informing a wide variety of funders of your programs, activities, and services as well as needs increases the number of potential sources of support. Conduct research, at the library or on-line, to determine what kind of events and programs these institutions currently support. Make sure the center's proposal is in line with funding guidelines and funding cycles. You will have to "make a case" for the funder—why should they support your effort? Be creative and remember that your center is doing good work and is worth supporting!

The Internet

The Internet can be a helpful tool for centers in search of funding. On-line, one can locate information on numerous foundations and corporations who provide funding to charitable organizations. Research that may take weeks of time at the library or hours of phone calls to potential funders can be done expeditiously and relatively easily on the Internet. Most major foundations and corporations have Web pages with pertinent information on the grant application process, programs that are funded and those that are not, who to contact within the organization, giving history, and so on.

Foundation Center Cooperating Collections

The Foundation Center's Cooperating Collections network is a coalition of libraries or nonprofit information centers that provide fundraising information and other funding-related technical assistance in their communities. The member libraries and centers provide free public access to a basic collection of Foundation Center publications during a regular schedule of hours, offering free funding research guidance to all visitors. Many also provide a variety of services for local nonprofit organizations, using staff or volunteers to prepare special materials, organize workshops, or conduct orientations. More than 200 sites exist in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. *FC Search*, the Foundation Center's database on CD-Rom, is available at many of these locations. This fully searchable database, which includes nearly 50,000 U.S. foundations and corporate givers, dramatically reduces the time required to conduct the crucial tasks of fundraising research. To find out where sites are located in your state, write to: Coordinator of Cooperating Collections, The Foundation Center, 79 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003-3076 or call 800/424-9836.

Creating Funder Profiles

It is important to always appear organized and methodical when interacting with potential funders. Staff members with

Questions to Ask Grantmakers

Before submitting information for a grant application, seek information from the grantmakers regarding their funding interests and past funding patterns. This will permit you to assess the fit between your organization and the funder, and the specific components that should be included in the application.

- **What are the grantmaker's programmatic interests? Do they include the type of program proposed by the center?**
- **Does the grantmaker have specific geographic boundaries/restrictions for funding?**
- **What is the typical size of grant awarded, and what is the average period of time for which it is awarded?**
- **Does the grantmaker have any policies prohibiting certain types of grants?**
- **Does the grantmaker generally prefer to be the sole source of funding for a project or do they prefer projects that involve other funding sources? Does the grantmaker expect the center to come up with matching funds?**
- **What types of organizations or projects does the grantmaker usually support?**
- **Does the grantmaker have formal application forms? Do they have specific deadlines or do they accept applications on a rolling basis throughout the year?**
- **How many copies of the proposal are required?**
- **How long does it generally take to review a proposal upon receipt?**
- **How does one check on the status of the poposal?**
- **Does the grantmaker have a mailing list and how does the center get on it?**

responsibility for contacting and working with funders should be well versed on the background of the particular funder as well as the center's history of contact with the funder. One way to ensure that they are is to develop a profile for each funder that has been approached by the center. This will help you keep track of which funders are interested in the areas that your program is working in, what contacts you have had with them, and the outcome of those contacts. Include the following kinds of information in the profile:

- funder type (see below)
- contact information for the funder
- funding priorities (e.g., information on issue areas they do and do not fund)
- giving cycle (e.g., information on their average grant size, the internal process they use to make decisions about funding, and the general time frame they use to make funding decisions)
- contact history (whether this funder has been approached previously, who made the contact, what the outcome was, and any special issues related to the center's relationship with the funder)
- the names of the staff members contacted

Keeping this type of information organized and available helps the Center maintains the best possible relationship with potential funders by not making requests that are inappropriate or do not reflect a clear understanding of the funder's concerns and priorities. A worksheet for developing funder profiles in provided at the end of this chapter.

Creating a Fundraising Plan

Approach fundraising in a methodical and focused way. Create a funding calendar and make sure to mark on it any proposal submission due dates and the dates for any community fundraising events you plan. Create a strategic plan just for your fundraising efforts. It should include information on

- your center's fundraising goals
- which funding sources you plan to target
- the action(s) needed to pursue funding from these sources
- who is responsible for contacting these sources
- a timeline for pursuing these sources
- the projected cost to the center of the proposed fundraising activity
- the expected revenue from the fundraising activity

Create a fundraising team that is responsible for ensuring that the activities in the fundraising work plan are completed and for brainstorming new fundraising activities. Worksheet 1 at the end of this chapter is a template for a fundraising strategic plan.

Type of Funder	Type of Request	Type of Pitch
National Foundation	• solicited proposals • unsolicited proposals	Identify contact/program officer, program director, and board members; develop relationship; discuss funding ideas; take timing and funding cues from contact; follow formal funding process
Community Foundation	• solicited proposal • unsolicited proposal • underwriting	Identify contact/program officer, program director, and board members; develop relationship; discuss funding ideas; take timing and funding cues from contact; follow formal funding process
Family Foundation	• solicited proposal • unsolicited proposal • underwriting	Identify contact/program officer, or family member, program director, and board members; develop relationship; discuss funding ideas; take timing and funding cues from contact; follow formal or informal funding process

Finding Appropriate Funders

There are many sources to turn to for funding and in-kind resources. Below are described some of the key types of sources your family support center should consider when developing its fundraising plan. Don't rely on any one funding source or type of funding source. Diversifying your funding sources makes the budgeting process easier and shows future donors that there is a broad interest in the center. The best way to do this is to market to all possible donors and attempt to achieve the most diverse funding mix.

Each center must assess what type or types of donors are the most feasible for its programs. After identifying the funding requirements of the center overall and of its individual programs, the center can more effectively target a specific type of donor.

In addition to creating a funding schema with varying funder types, the center should diversify within funding type. This entails having each program within the center supported by more than one funding stream or source, making programs less vulnerable to cuts in individual sources. One should also identify ahead of time what alternative sources for funding might be available if a particular source is cut and what program arrangements could lessen the impact of such cuts.

Type of Funder	Type of Request	Type of Pitch
Individual	• direct mail • underwriting • participation in events • volunteerism	Develop relationship through mailings or personal contact with program director, board member, staff, or parent leader; identify individual's interests and ability to help, discuss specific program needs, e.g., funding or volunteer ideas; present specific areas where individual can be of assistance either through financial support or service
Local Business	• underwriting • in-kind donation • employee volunteerism	Develop relationship with owner or key staff through mailings or personal contact with program director, board members, staff, or parent leaders; identify areas of mutual interest; discuss program needs, e.g., funding or volunteer ideas
State/Federal/Local Agency	• soliceted proposals • unsoliceted proposals	Identify all potential funding sources, program director and staff; develop relationships with multiple contacts, become included on request-for-proposal notification lists; follow formal funding guidelines
Corporation	• underwriting • in-kind donation • employee volunteerism	Identify the director of corporate contributions or a key person within the company to champion your cause; buid relationship; identify areas of mutual interest—good public relations is not always enough
Corporate Foundation	• solicited proposals • unsoliceted proposals	Identify the director of corporate foundation (may operate independently of or in conjunction with corporate or employee giving), or a key person within the company to champion your cause; build relationship; identify areas of mutual interest—good public relations is not always enough; generally use a formal solicitation process

Individual Donors

A large portion of the money donated in this country comes from individuals. Even though corporations and foundations donate larger sums, individuals can be a great source of financial help. Get creative with this aspect of campaigning. Most of the funds from individuals are generated by mail, phone, or door-to-door campaigns and by special events and benefits. This type of fundraising has marketing benefits even if many individuals contacted do not give money. This type of campaign requires staff hours and money for mailings, and you will get a low percentage of returns. However, heeding the following considerations can maximize returns from individual donors.

Why Do Individuals Give

What is it that makes someone donate to any given program? Family Support America staff asked this question of individuals attending technical assistance sessions on fundraising at various sites across the country. The reasons that people gave as to why they gave money were many and varied. When individuals choose to donate time or money to programs, it is generally to those that they believe affect them or are close to them in some way. Below is a list of some of the reasons for donating commonly given at these sessions:

- They were asked.
- The organization provides basic necessities to those in need.
- The donor had a personal connection with the cause, e.g., an individual's mother died of cancer, so the individual donates to programs supporting cancer research.
- The organization provides services that are in line with an individual's beliefs.
- An individual was personally involved with the program, e.g., the individual used to volunteer as a Big Brother and he now makes monetary donations to the program.
- The organization provides a service that the donor utilizes, e.g., public radio.
- Individuals want tax deductions.
- Donating makes the individual feel that he or she is having some influence and is contributing to society.
- Employer matching programs—when an individual's donation will be doubled by an employer matching program, the employee often feels more of an incentive to give.
- Individuals feel a sense of obligation.
- Individuals attempt to save money in the long run by donating to prevention programs.
- Donating to an organization that works with other agencies in the community multiplies the investment.
- The agency was timely in requesting the donation, for example, it requested funds just after a television program on a relevant issue aired.

Make sure to address these reasons in any outreach or solicitation materials intended to raise funds from individuals.

Planned Giving

Planned giving affords an individual the opportunity to make a gift or to promise that a portion of his or her estate will be donated to an organization. There are several mechanisms whereby this can be accomplished. While it is important that center directors be aware of this method of charitable donation, it is advisable to encourage a donor interested in this type of gift to consult his or her lawyer or financial planner.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, located in Hartford, Connecticut, has made a significant investment in family support centers as part of its Brighter Futures Initiative. This community foundation, with a 75-year history of supporting and serving children and families in Hartford's neighborhoods and communities, has an asset base of $550 million dollars and makes $29 million in grants each year. In 1990, the foundation embarked on the Brighter Futures Initiative as a way to increase learning and school success and increase the quality of early childhood services. Brighter Futures has four areas of concern: family support and development, health care, early childhood and quality childcare, and promoting responsive schools.

This initiative was unique for the foundation because it involved an innovative listening-and-engaging process with community. The foundation made a bold move to learn, hold discussions, and fund concurrently. Meetings held with Brighter Futures Consortium and the Frontline Worker's Network made it clear that what was needed was a community place for parents to meet and receive support from one another. This place needed to be neighborhood-based, provide a range of services through collaboration with other community programs, and provide support to new parents. Increasing the interaction between parents and service providers became an overarching theme.

With these objectives providing the framework for future work, the Hartford Foundation made a commitment to work toward changing its application process and the way it engaged community representatives. It held a series of meetings with childcare groups, community police, church groups, and tenants associations to engage them in the planning and development of neighborhood family support centers. From these meetings, potential candidates for future funding emerged.

In 1994 five groups were selected to receive planning grants of $10,000, which were provided through the foundation as well as through the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund. These groups were composed of parents and other community members committed to developing family support centers to provide safe places for families to gather, for adults to organize, for parents and children to interact, and for parent support and development. These groups were given the task of interviewing representatives of community-based organizations that could possibly provide fiscal and programmatic support. They then selected appropriate groups to partner with.

Four of the five groups were successful in creating these innovative partnerships. The foundation provided $250,000 over a three-year period to support the development of the family support centers. The groups that received implementation funding and are now operating family support centers are

- RAMBUH Family Center, located in Northeast Neighborhood, in collaboration with the Village for Families and Children
- Trust House Family Center, located in Sheldon/Charter Oaks, in collaboration with Trust House
- Southside Family Center, located in Southwest Neighborhood, in collaboration with Connecticut Children's Medical Center and, most recently, Catholic Family Services
- Centro de Dessarrollo y Reafirmacion Familiar (Center for Family Development and Reaffirmation), located in the Frog Hollow neighborhood, in collaboration with Catholic Family Services

These centers have received over $2.3 million during the five-year period. During this time, the foundation has learned much about the importance and benefits of engaging with parents and community members. The family support center component has benefited the community and met a need that had been clearly articulated by community representatives. What will the future look like for these centers? More will be done to enhance the quality of the services they offer and to identify measurable outcomes for the centers and the children and families they serve. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving remains committed to the concept of family support centers and to services that strengthen families.

Memorial or Honorary Gift

When someone associated with your center has died, his or her family or friends may be interested in making a memorial or honorary gift to acknowledge the center's positive role in his or her life. This is becoming increasingly popular as a meaningful way to remember a departed loved one in lieu of purchasing flowers.

To avoid awkwardness or uncertainty, and to support the family at this difficult time, the center should have a policy in place in the event that a memorial fund is to be established. Gift acknowledgements should be made to the donor as well as the family. This will enable the family to acknowledge the gift if they so choose.

A memorial service can be held at a later date, bringing together the family members and the donors. This activity is beneficial to everyone involved and can result in long-term good will and increased support for the center.

Community Foundations

A community foundation is a collection of individual funds and resources, given by local citizens, to enhance and support the quality of life in their community. Community foundations support charitable activities in local areas. They represent the fastest growing philanthropic base in the United States. They are often interested in convening and providing support for collaborations that help multiple agencies in a community fulfill unmet needs. A number of them are very interested in family support.

While procedures for applying to community foundations are similar to those for other foundations, the advantage of seeking funds from community foundations is that their mission is to build capacity within the community. This means that they are generally receptive to a community-based focus and, by definition, fund local programs. Also, community foundations often have community members on their board. Be sure to develop and build on relationships with these possible program participants and advocates. Community foundations are usually responsive to local characteristics and needs. The Council on Foundations, based in Washington D.C., has a locator for community foundations available on its Web site (www.cof.org).

Private Foundations

Private foundations are specifically designed to establish, maintain, and assist educational, social, charitable, and other agencies that promote public welfare. The primary way that foundations serve this purpose is through grants to nonprofit organizations. A request for funds must be accompanied by a written proposal or application. Some research is necessary to find the appropriate way to apply to specific foundations and to find the right fit between the center and a possible funding source. The center should not send the same appeal to each foundation. Research should be directed to finding out what a foundation likes to fund, what organizations and projects it has given to in the past, what geographic areas it favors, and what its current interests are (Fay, Gilbert, and Wrean 1995, 52). Proposals should emphasize the compatibility of the center's and the foundation's goals. There is a wealth of information on this type of fund raising. The local library and the Internet are good places to start. The drawbacks of this type of funding lie mainly in the time involved in researching appropriate foundations and writing proposals that may be turned down. Be careful what you ask for; a proposal which is not written with the greatest care can result in a program which is difficult to maintain or which, in practice, does not completely fit with the aims of the center.

Family Foundations

Family foundations are an ever-growing source of charitable funding, and new foundations are being created daily. For a variety of reasons, wealthy families and individuals are choosing to establish foundations. Through these foundations, they manage their charitable giving. Some family foundations are managed by experienced professional staff, while others are managed by family members. Solicitation guidelines vary. Some have very simple and direct funding guidelines; others have very elaborate application procedures.

As with any funder, identify the foundation's funding focus and make your case for their support. Research and relationship building through the executive director, board members, parents, and friends of the organization may prove very successful as many of these foundations represent new philanthropic dollars.

Federal Funding

Types of Federal Grants

Federal funding opportunities available to family support centers are diverse. There are six common types of such assistance:

- **Formula grants:** Cash grants awarded to state and local governments to be disseminated in congruence with federal legislation. More commonly known as block grants.
- **Project grants:** Cash grants available to all applicants, not just for governmental agencies, to support projects.
- **Sale, exchange, or donations of property and goods:** Programs that allow entities to sell, exchange, or donate federal property such as food, drugs, equipment, and real estate.
- **Use of property, facilities and equipment:** Programs that provide loans of federal property and/or equipment for which all entities are eligible.
- **Advisory services and counseling:** Programs that encourage the outreach of federal officials to do in-service programs and counseling on general and specialized topics. All entities are eligible.
- **Training:** Programs that provide federal training on general and specialized subjects to non-federal employees. All entities are eligible.

Like foundation funds, these funds may have large award amounts. These grants can be challenging to win, and compiling application information may require some extra time. Federal and state grants often also have extensive reporting and evaluation requirements.

Some Federal Funding Streams for Family Support

Below are descriptions of a number of federal funding streams being used in states across the country to fund family support. These sources change from year to year and may no longer be available. Check one of the resources at the end of this chapter for current information.

- **Community-Based Family Resource and Support Program:** Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It provides grants to states to develop and implement, or expand and enhance, a comprehensive statewide system of community-based family resource services. To receive these funds, the state must have established or maintained a trust fund or other funding mechanism that pools federal, state, and private funds and makes them available for child abuse and neglect prevention and family resource programs. Many states use these funds to support quality enhancements, peer review, and family involvement in family support training. In fiscal year 1999, participating jurisdictions will receive grants totaling $33 million.

- **The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, Title IV-B Part 2:** Focuses on strengthening families, preventing abuse, and protecting children. These grants help state child welfare agencies and Indian tribes operate preventive, family preservation services and community- based family support services for families at risk or in crisis. Family preservation services typically are activities that help families alleviate crises that might lead to out-of-home placements of children because of abuse, neglect, or parental inability to care for their children. They help to maintain the safety of children in their own home, support families preparing to reunify or adopt, and assist families in obtaining other services to meet multiple needs. Time limited reunification services of up to 15 months and adoption promotion services were added as service categories.

- **The Child Welfare Services Program:** Provides grants to states and Indian tribes under Title IV- B of the Social Security Act. These publicly funded services are available to children and their families without regard to income and are directed toward keeping families together. The services include preventive interventions that seek to keep children from having to be removed from their homes. When this is not possible, the foster care placements and permanent adoption homes are found. In addition, reunification services encourage the return home, when appropriate, of children who have been removed from their families. Each state receives a base amount of $70,000. Additional funds are distributed in proportion to the state's population of children under age 21 multiplied by the complement of state's per capita income. The state match is 25 percent. Training is not a priority for the use of these funds, and it is used primarily for services and administration.

- **Title IV-E Foster Care Program:** Provides funds to states to assist with the costs of foster care maintenance for eligible children; administrative costs to manage the program; and training for staff, for foster parents, and for private agency staff. The purpose of the program is to help states provide proper care for children who need placement outside their homes, in a foster family home, or an institution.

- **Title IV-E Adoption Assistance:** Provides funds to states to facilitate the adoption of children with special needs in permanent adoptive homes and thus preventing long, inappropriate stays in foster care. Federal matching funds are available to states for one time payments for the nonrecurring costs of adopting a special needs child, and for monthly subsidies to adoptive families to assist them with caring for a child with special needs. Federal funds also are used to assist states with the administrative costs of managing the program and for staff training. States may claim open-ended federal matching at a rate of 75 percent to train personnel employed by the state or by local agencies administering the program and to train foster and adoptive parents.

- **Child Welfare Training Program, Section 426 of the Social Security Act:** Upgrades the skills and qualifications of child welfare workers through their participation, full-time or part-time, in programs focused specifically on child welfare services. Discretionary grants are awarded to public and private nonprofit institutions of higher learning to develop and improve education/training programs and resources for child welfare service providers. Fiscal year 1998 funds were available for the following priority areas: (1) professional education for public child welfare practitioners, (2) training for the frontline public child welfare agency staff in the use of the statewide automated child welfare information system, and (3) training for child protective and child welfare services staff for collaboration with community-based agencies to provide services to at-risk families to prevent child abuse and neglect. These funds are usually applied for by schools of social work.

- **Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Research and Demonstration Projects:** Funds that support research on the causes, prevention, and treatment of child abuse and neglect; demonstration programs to identify the best means of preventing maltreatment and treating troubled families; and the development and implementation of training programs. Grants for these projects are provided nationwide on a competitive basis to state and local agencies and organizations. Projects have focused on every aspect of the prevention, identification, investigation, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. In fiscal year 1999, approximately $14.2 million in discretionary funds were awarded to support new and continuing research and demonstration grants as well as evaluation, technical assistance, and information dissemination activities.

- **Title XX of the Social Security Block Grant Program:** Provides assistance to states to enable them to furnish services directed at one or more of five broad goals:

  1. achieving or maintaining economic self-support to prevent, reduce, or eliminate dependency
  2. achieving or maintaining self-sufficiency, including reduction or prevention of dependency
  3. preventing or remedying neglect, abuse, or exploitation of children and adults unable to protect their own interests, or preserving, rehabilitating or reuniting families
  4. preventing or reducing inappropriate institutional care by providing for community-based care, home-based care, or other forms of less intensive care
  5. securing referral or admission for institutional care when other forms of care are not appropriate or providing services to individuals in institutions

  States have wide discretion to determine the services to be provided and the groups that may be eligible for services. States may also use their allotment for staff training, administration, planning, evaluation, and purchasing technical assistance in developing, implementing, or administering the state social services program. In fiscal year 1999, $1,909 million was the authorized funding ceiling.

- **Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF):** Used to support the transition from welfare to work. States have considerable flexibility to use this welfare reform block grant not only for cash assistance, but also for childcare, job-training services, and other support services. Generally, the funds must be used (1) to provide assistance to needy families, (2) to end dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage (3) to prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and (4) to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The TANF program provides tremendous flexibility for funding a wide variety of activities, supportive services, and benefits to accomplish the purposes of the program. Some areas include support for work activities, childcare, transportation, education and training, mental health and substance abuse, domestic violence, developmental and learning disabilities, enhancing or supplementing the family income or assets, child welfare, family formation and pregnancy prevention, community development, and general activities. Under general, the federal guidance suggests providing training to counselors in employee and family assistance programs about the needs of the population leaving welfare.

In communities across the country, TANF dollars not used otherwise are used to provide a range of services to low-income families with children. TANF can also be used to train employees to address the needs of the population leaving welfare. For example, in New York State, local districts have used TANF money to train frontline family support workers addressing such issues as cultural competency, communication, strength-based assessment, and family development. In El Paso County, Colorado, TANF dollars are supporting maternal and infant support services, school attendance projects, services to young parents and grandparent caregivers, employment services, child support, and housing assistance.

- **Community Services Block Grant:** Provides services and resources to reduce the causes of poverty. The funds can be used for a wide variety of services and activities that focus on strengthening families and revitalizing communities. The federal government identifies eligible entities with the majority being community action agencies. Local agencies have the flexibility to use funds as a way of supporting family development and support training. In New York State, administrative and discretionary funds were used to develop the Family Development Training and Credentialing Program.

- **Child Care Development Block Grant:** Provides funds for childcare subsidies, facility development, rehabilitation, creating and sustaining networks, supporting Child Care Resource and Referral, and quality improvements. Although the largest portion of the funds is used for subsidies, resources can be used for training of childcare providers and professional development. In New York State, resources are used to provide scholarships for family day care and center-based providers to enhance their skills.

- **Chapter C of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:** Provides funding for supports and services to children birth to three with disabilities or at risk of developmental delays. This early intervention program for infants and toddlers provides funding to states to identify children with disabilities or those at risk as well as to track those at risk. The federal government provides a clear definition of disability and defined services. Services are included in an Individual Service Plan. Some services for adults include respite care, counseling, transportation, and parent education. Services for children include audiology, physical therapy, and speech pathology. Resources are available for training service providers, medical personnel, and generic service providers such as childcare providers and parents. Some topical areas include identification and referral and ways to have service providers support parents and children in natural settings such as their homes. In New York, a portion of the Chapter C funds is used to provide parent leadership training through Partners in Policymaking. This training program offers a three weekend training program on parent leadership.

- **Even Start Family Literacy Programs:** Provide resources to improve literacy among families with young children.
- **Maternal and Child Health Block Grant:** Provides resources to promote the health and well-being of children and families.

Where to Find Out More about Federal Funding Opportunities

- **Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)**
  Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Official guide to federal programs authorized by public law. This document answers basic questions. The specific deadlines and application procedures should be verified with the administering agency.
- **Federal Assistance Programs Retrieval System (FAPRS)**
  This is a computerized question and answer session that was developed to give grant seekers more rapid access to the information included in CFDA. Every state has an access point where these searches can be done. Request further information by calling your local member of Congress or by writing to: Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Staff, General Services Administration, Ground Floor, Reporters Building, 300 7th Street S.W., Washington, D.C. 20407.
- **Federal Register**
  Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Official news publication of the government that includes announcements of public meetings, new programs available, changes in grant regulations, and deadlines. The Federal Register can now be accessed on-line at www.nara.gov/fedreg/.
- **U.S. Government Manual**
  Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Handbook that describes federal agencies and their responsibilities.
- **Commerce Business Daily**
  Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Publication in which agencies are required to announce upcoming contracts and requests for proposals (RFPs), as well as listing grant recipients.
- **Federal Executive Telephone Directory**
  Carroll Publishing, 1058 Thomas Jefferson Street NW, Washington, DC 20007. Publication that comes out six times per year with the names, addresses and telephone numbers of key government officials.
- **Agency catalogs, newsletters, program announcements, and requests for proposals (RFPs)**
  After you have done your research and have determined those agencies who typically administer funds of interest to you, write to their public information office and ask to be placed on their mailing list for future publications.

Information to Collect when Applying for Federal Funding

- correct name for the grant-in-aid program or program category
- correct name and address of administering agency
- name, title, telephone number of lay administrator
- major purpose of legislation that authorized the program
- latest regulations governing program and any indication that they may change in the near future
- current priorities of the program and the possibility of them changing
- eligibility requirements of applicants
- appropriations in current fiscal year and amount projected for next year
- the portion of sums that will likely be retained for continuation awards and how much will be available for new grants
- the required proposal format and accompanying forms
- the compliance requirements and individual agency policies
- whether a preliminary letter or abstract is required or a capability statement is necessary to receive a full request for funding (RFP)
- application deadlines
- dates of expected proposal review and notification
- the application and review process, including the latest selection criteria
- the rating from the previous year's selection criteria
- the names and affiliations of those who served a proposal reviewers
- a list of grants or contracts awarded under the program during the past two years, including amounts
- the tendency of the agency to cut budget requests
- details on any restrictions placed on the use of the program's funds
- requirements for matching funds or cost sharing
- policies toward renewals and samples of renewal application forms
- requirements for reports once the grant or contract is received and other information on project administration
- whether a state or local government plays any role in the program administration or selection process and if so, the names and telephone numbers of those in your area

The time and effort that you put into this stage will have considerable payoff later when you have been able to narrow your proposal writing down to those federal programs with which you are most likely to be successful.

Statewide Family Support Programs

States with statewide family support programs include:

- Arkansas
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Florida
- Hawaii
- Indiana
- Kentucky
- Maryland
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- New Jersey
- New York
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- Tennessee
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Wisconsin

State and Local Funding

States and municipalities across the country are funding family support programs. These programs can be as extensive as Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Service Centers, a program that approximately invests about $40 million dollars in 600 family resource and youth service centers around the state. Overall, about 19 states fund some sort of statewide family support program. These programs are funded out of Children's Trust Funds, through education departments, health departments, welfare departments, drug and alcohol abuse dollars, and interagency collaborations at the state level. In addition, cities and even some counties across the country are using local tax dollars and funding sources to fund family support programs at the local level. Some states or localities have used tax levies to fund systems of family support services. States can use line items on tax return forms so people can directly contribute money to a nonprofit of their choice or use a portion of property or marriage taxes toward a certain programmatic area. Others use state appropriations, or federal funds passing through to the state.

Many of the federal funding sources for family support listed above go directly to a state or local lead agency that is responsible for making decisions about who the funds will go to and for what. Often the name of the federal program will not be the name that is given to the program at the state level. Generally the best way to find out who is responsible for administering these funds in your state—and whether or not your center can apply to receive any of the funds available in your state or area—is to contact the federal agency responsible for the dollars and request a list of lead agencies for your state.

Visit the official web page for your state or city. This can help provide important background information on the different social service agencies, what they fund, and who to contact to get more information.

Corporations and Local Businesses

Corporate Giving Programs

Corporations contribute to family support centers out of a mix of altruism and self-interest. Unlike foundations, corporations do not exist to make donations to charity. A corporation's main responsibilities are to its employees, customers, and shareholders.

Corporations may give to build community relations, to prepare a workforce for the future, to enhance their image, to return favors, to receive tax breaks, to improve community life and build cohesiveness, and to influence legislative and other various opinion makers.

> ***"When I used to fund raise, especially from corporations, they were interested in and impressed with knowing the percentage of money spent on direct services. For example, if I said 75 cents on every dollar went to program services, they then felt their money was going to the targeted interests and showed good administrative management—that is, not supporting management or administrative overhead, but service delivery expenses."***
>
> **—Cheryl Peek, Lecturer, Family Support Specialization, School of Social Work, University of Chicago**

Corporations understand that giving is key to good corporate business and citizenship, as charity portrays a strong and positive community image. However, along with giving for the sake of altruism, often corporations expect concrete rewards for their donations. The type of rewards expected vary among corporations; some examples are media attention, team building exercises via volunteer projects with employees at your program site, or improvements in the area of the community in which you are working.

Corporate donors often like to focus donations on those causes that are viewed as favorable in the public eye, such as education, environmental issues, and preventative health. Likewise, corporations want to maximize their giving. One way to achieve this is by getting corporate employees involved with programs through volunteer projects. Corporations view volunteering as both a team-building exercise and a chance to develop good standing within the community.

Maximizing the center's chance for receiving funding from a large corporation requires planning. Each corporation has a different set of requirements and a different approach to funding, so most have a very specific application processes. Some corporations consider a broad range of causes in their donating practices. Many donate employee time, professional services, or in-kind resources such as clothing or food. Corporate donors are also potential employers for participants.

When appealing to a corporation, there are four main approaches to keep in mind:

- First, if the center is located in the same community as a major corporation, *emphasize this proximity*. Corporations are more likely to support agencies that can have an impact on the lives of their employees. This link can be made explicit through emphasizing how the center may help form a more skilled work force, affect a decline in absenteeism due to childcare problems, or produce a more attractive, supportive community for workers and their families.

- Second, if the center's programs fall within a particular charity interest of the corporation, this should be made explicit. Most corporations publish documents about their donation campaigns, and Web sites offer information on their concerns.

- Third, keep in mind what the corporation's product is. Product donations are an excellent way for the center to gain in-kind resources and a great way for the business to market its product.

- Fourth, draw attention to the positive publicity that a donation could generate for the company. Offer to write an article for a local newspaper on the gift or publicize the donation in the center newsletter.

Appealing to Local Businesses

Local business owners are committed to the community in a variety of ways. Their employees and customers may live in the community, and the owner may live in the community. If the employer or the employees or customers participate in programs offered by the family support center, the owner may be inclined to support the center. Even if this is not the case, concern about the general well-being of the community may be enough to motivate the business owner's support.

SAMPLE LETTER TO A LOCAL BUSINESS

Dawn Smith
Marketing Officer / Events Coordinator
West Bank
1241 Main Street, Suite 120
Alltown, USA

April 29, 2000

Dear Ms. Smith,

Once again the Family Resource Center would like to thank you for your support of the families in the Alltown community. Some wonderful parents in that neighborhood, who are very involved with their children and their community, are participants in our center. West Bank has continued to show their involvement in this community.

As you may know, on Wednesday, May 22, the preschool children from Main Street Preschool will be graduating. For many families, this event will be the first educational celebration that they experience. Graduation will take place at the South Alltown Arts Center located at 850 S. Main Street at 6:00 pm.

Parents have joined staff to plan this event. Committees have been set up to address the different needs for the graduation. The parent committees report that all needed supplies have been obtained except decorations.

Your past support has always helped make our graduation a success. This year, the parent committee would like to request a contribution of $75.00 to cover the cost of table and stage decorations. At the graduation, West Bank will be recognized as our sponsor. An invitation will be forthcoming.

The Family Resource Center would like to thank you in advance for any support that you can provide. If you have any questions regarding this request, please feel free to contact me at 847/555-4444.

Sincerely,

Deborah Jones
Parent Advocate

Local business owners can be motivated by the same forces as corporations: positive publicity, proximity, charitable interest. Family support centers are in a unique position to support local businesses and benefit from their charitable inclinations. The case for local business to support family support centers can be made rather directly: they support families emotionally, educationally, and financially, thereby helping to create stable families. Stable families in turn create a stable and thriving local economy. Local business and family support centers are partners supporting communities.

Relationships with local businesses need to be nurtured. A business owner may not immediately recognize the nature of the relationship between the work of the family support center and the ultimate benefit to the company. The owner may not be aware of how many of the business's customers and employees are involved with the family support center. Develop your relationship with local businesses over time, consistently providing opportunities for involvement, participation, and support. Work with board members, staff, and parent leaders to develop a strategy for informing local business owners of your programs and services as well as your needs.

When you receive support, always make sure that it is appropriately acknowledged. When possible, provide a public relations opportunity for your donor and the agency. This is mutually beneficial.

Planning Your Approach

Developing A Fundraising Dossier

Before you begin your fundraising efforts, assemble information that you will be likely to need for all of your appeals. Keeping the following information on file streamlines your fundraising efforts so that you can respond quickly to fundraising opportunities with a short turn-around. You won't need all of the information for every funding opportunity, and you will have to adapt statements of need and other components for each specific proposal, but having this information readily accessible in both hard copy and electronic form facilitates fundraising efforts.

Fundraising Checklist

Case Statement

The case statement is used both for internal purposes, to help keep organizational goals in focus, and for external purposes, to establish the case for funding. The case statement should include the following:

- the agency's mission statement
- documentation supporting the need for the agency's services
- an outline of the agency's accomplishments in meeting such needs and a game plan for continuing to meet such needs in the future
- evidence that the agency is financially responsible, e.g., an annual report
- current yearly budget

Pertinent Organizational Data

You should have information and statistical data available to include in proposals or refer to when speaking with funders. Such information should include:

- tax exemption forms
- listing of current board members
- budget summaries for the past three years
- letters of support from participants and community partners
- listing of current grants and major donors
- brochures and copies of positive publicity
- organizational chart
- numbers of volunteers, volunteer hours, and description of how volunteers are utilized
- evaluation data/report

Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer

After determining the monetary needs and aspirations of the center, prepare to communicate with possible funding sources. Donors want to know about both the center and the specific program or project. Preparing for their questions in advance helps you make a stronger case for funding. Being prepared to answer these questions is essential for a successful bid.

Beyond basic inquiries about the nature of family support, funders will want to know:

- What does the program do?
- What are the characteristics of the families served by the program?
- What benefits do families gain from the program?
- Why do families need the service? Are there statistics or reports that support these claims?
- How will the donated money be spent?
- What measures does the center utilize to make sure the program is working? Are evaluation results available that show positive impacts?
- What other benefits are attributable to the program?
- What percentage of the agency's budget is allocated to administrative activities? To service delivery?
- What are the weaknesses of the program? (Analyzing the center's strengths and weaknesses before meeting with the funder allows you to highlight assets and remain composed during the meeting.)

Be prepared to provide these answers to grantmaking organizations, to individuals from whom funding is solicited, to persons participating in fundraising events, and to third-party payers. Anyone who donates funds to the center has a right to know this information, and presenting it up-front can better your chances of being funded.

Making the Request

Responding to an RFP

A request for proposal (RFP) is a notice sent out or posted by a grantmaking entity to notify interested parties, generally social service agencies, that funding is available for a certain kind of program and to solicit their proposals for appropriate programs. The RFP describes what type of program the grantmaker will fund, what the outcomes of such a program should be, and the criteria for selecting recipients. It may also specify the time frame for the project, possible costs, geographic location, participants to be served, and the sort of information that should be submitted.

When responding to an RFP, make sure that the requested program type fits the center's purpose and mission. Responding to RFPs without considering how a program will fit in with the center may have unintended results with which no one will be completely satisfied.

Finding Out About RFPs

The best way to learn about RFPs from private foundations and corporations is to watch newsletters and other sources of information on current activities distributed by the organization. Government agencies are usually required to announce the availability of funds prior to selecting participants. This is usually done via publications soliciting government contracts or via public announcements in major daily newspapers. Some departments require interested groups to provide a statement of capability or to complete a form requesting that they be placed on the bidder's list. See the resources listed at the end of this chapter.

Key Components of a Proposal

1. **Statement of Need**
   What is the problem or issue that is being addressed? This section should include current, convincing data to substantiate the center's need. Include information about other attempts that have been made to address the issue and about how the center will work to enhance any existing programs. Support your proposal with the most recent and pertinent facts available. Information that is too general, or that does not apply to your organization or the project, will not be convincing. Give the reader hope by presenting a possible solution to the problem at hand—your solution.

2. **Method of Approach**
   What will the center do to solve the problem being addressed? In this section, display clear and achievable objectives and goals for the program as well as the means by which they are to be accomplished. If you are seeking funding for an existing program, state what it has accomplished to date and why it should be completed over a specified time frame. Be certain to emphasize how your program differs from others that have been implemented to address the same or similar issues. Be concise, but be sufficiently

Proposal Tips

- Make a clear and concise proposal. Leave out all gratuitous language.
- Proofread the proposal before sending it to the funder.
- Answer all the funder's questions.
- Make the proposal look nice. Presentation is important.
- Clearly present what the center does, how it does it, and how the grantor's money will help the center accomplish its goals.
- Make a clear link to the funder's interests.
- List the center's accomplishments.
- Include a sound budget.
- Demonstrate community support for the center by estimating the amount of in-kind services that have been donated (e.g., volunteer time or donated food from an annual food drive).
- Include a list of other donors. The more funders your organization has, the more reliable it will be in the eyes of the funder.
- Have a realistic plan for evaluating effectiveness in the field. Do not over-promise.

detailed to show that this is a well-orchestrated program. Your methods section should include

- a detailed description of what will occur from the program onset to its conclusion
- a timetable to make it easier for the reader to visualize the order and timing of tasks
- an explanation of why the specific methods were chosen and why you believe they will lead to the outcomes you anticipate

3. **Budget**
   How much money is needed and exactly how will it be spent? It is usually best to use a line item budget to show how the money will be spent (see chapter 10). Include matching funds if applicable. Project how funding for this project will continue into the future.

4. **Results**
   Who will benefit from this program, and how will they benefit? What is the impact expected from this program for the population being served and the community as a whole? What changes should the funder and program participants expect to see? How will these impacts be measured, and what will be the criteria used to evaluate success?

5. **History of the Organization**
   Where did the center come from? Briefly state the center's background, experience, and history, and always include your mission statement and whether or not the Internal Revenue Service has granted the center 501(c)(3) status. State why the center has a unique capacity to carry out this program, and describe how this program aligns with the mission statement. There is a natural inclination to include this information at the beginning of the proposal, but it is usually better to sell the need for the project first and then convince the funder of the center's ability to carry it out.

6. **Supplemental Information**
   This could include letters of support for the agency and/or project, recent newsletters, articles about the agency and its programs, evaluation or reviews, and annual reports.

Responding to Program Announcements

Program announcements are most commonly used by grantmakers (public and private) who want to support projects in a particular field but want to leave considerable leeway in how the program will be developed and implemented. Program announcements usually include the following elements:

- a description of the nature of the problem that the donor is addressing
- topical areas or categories of projects for which proposals may be submitted
- eligibility requirements for applicants
- deadlines
- what information must be submitted and how
- selection criteria and process
- the amount of money available

The most dependable way to receive program announcements is to (1) identify all government and private sources that may provide funding to the center, (2) send letters to these sources asking to be placed on routine mailing lists for all future announcements and application forms, and (5) routinely monitor those government and private news sources that identify upcoming funding opportunities.

Pitching an Unsolicited Proposal

When pitching an unsolicited proposal, be creative! Once you have identified a potential funder, decide how to pitch the idea. This project is important to you and the center, so clearly outline the benefits to the center, the participants, and the community. Establish a clear relationship between the intended outcomes of the activity and the funding priorities of the funder. Is this program unique? Will it build your organization? Select funders that are known to support pilot or demonstration projects. Be very clear as you describe the programmatic needs and services to be provided and the projected benefits of this project. Are there benefits to the funder? Will it address an issue that is of specific interest to the funder?

Recruit board members, parents, or other community members and advocates of your program to pitch the idea. Most funders speak daily with executive directors and members of the program staff. Demonstrated grass roots appeal and commitment can be an advantage. If you are pitching the idea to an individual or a company, do not underestimate the public relations benefit to the funder. Some individuals and businesses appreciate the association of their names with a good cause or activity.

Obtaining Underwriting for an Event or Activity

Soliciting support from a donor to underwrite an event or activity is very similar to pitching an unsolicited proposal. The primary difference is that underwriting is generally used to support a short-term activity or event rather than an ongoing program. In addition to identifying potential funders and making the case for their support, build into your proposal various levels at which the donor can support the event. It is important to always provide options to donors so that in the event that they cannot support one proposal, they will have another option to consider.

When you are seeking support to underwrite an event, plan ahead so that you can begin soliciting support well in advance of the event. By planning ahead, you can create opportunities in pre-event publicity to acknowledge the underwriter's support. Invite sponsors to attend and participate in the event. Provide an opportunity for participants to thank the funder's representatives in person. Following the event, send a thank you letter and enclose materials such as brochures, posters, pre-event publicity, programs or other materials that demonstrate your acknowledgement of the underwriter's support. Have the event committee chair and participants send thank-you notes as well.

The follow-up after the event is very important, as it plants the seed for future funding requests. Throughout the year, stay in touch with your donors; do not just contact them when you are soliciting donations.

How Our Center Does It

The Parenting Center

New Orleans, Louisiana

One fundraiser thrown by The Parenting Center (TPC), originally called SPOOKTACULAR, combines a safe, alternative way to celebrate Halloween with an advertising campaign for its parent education services. TPC began this event by giving area residents a place to bring their children for an evening of fun—offering rides, games, and activities for children from ages three to six. In keeping with tradition, TPC even erected a variety of trick-or-treat facades so that children had doorbells to ring. After five years, TPC partnered with their next-door neighbor, the Audubon Park Zoo, to transform SPOOKTACULAR into a new event, BOO AT THE ZOO, to benefit both TPC and the zoo. The event starts with a special party for patrons and later opens to the general public in a swirl of costumes and lights. It includes trick-or-treat houses, game booths, stagecoach rides, a spook house, food and beverages, magicians, jugglers, puppeteers, music, activities, and a spookride through designated parts of the zoo. Costs are kept low by staffing the event with volunteers and soliciting in-kind donations. While ticket and food sales contribute to the event's fundraising success, the bulk of the dollars raised comes from an underwriting and patrons campaign. Asking for contributions of between $300 and $1,000, TPC offers underwriters a choice of options, from sponsoring children to attend the event, to displaying the names of their businesses, on a trick-or-treat house, or placing the donor's name on a headstone in the "cemetery." TPC created the contribution categories "Great Pumpkin," "Witch and Warlock," and "Ghostbuster" for individual patrons, each of whom recieve free tickets to the evening's celebration.

Using Direct Mail*

There is a range of opinions among professional fundraisers on the value of direct mail. Some see it as a waste of time and money; others see it as the best way to increase your donor base. Most think it has at least a limited place in a fundraising plan for the following reasons:

- It can help identify new donors.
- It can be used for public relations.
- It increases visibility.
- It helps identify potential volunteers.
- It helps to publicize new programs.

Is Direct Mail Appropriate for Our Center?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your organization well known and well respected in the community where you will solicit?
- Is your organization unique in your community?
- Is there a clear and critical need that can be explained in the appeal?
- Can you offer benefits to donors and/or show how their gift will make a difference?
- Do you have enough time and money to test your direct mail thoroughly?
- Can you afford to lose your initial investment in direct mail?

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*This section is adapted with permission from Barnes (1995) "How should I use direct mail?" Internet Nonprofit Center, www.nonprofits.org

Direct Mail Contents

- Personal letter (short or long)
- Personalized reply form
- Reply envelope

Sources of Lists

- Develop an in-house list by asking board members, volunteers, and current donors to give names of those whom they think might want to become involved.
- Trade names with other like organizations for one-time use.
- Rent lists from other local organizations in your regional area.
- Rent local portions of national lists that support causes similar to your group's.

Format and Design

- Renewal packages tend to be presented simply.
- Special appeals and cultivation/acquisition mailing tend to be more graphic, using more color and photos.
- Capital campaigns tend to be more personalized and conservative in their graphic approach.

Timing

- Avoid mailing in April, when recipients may be paying income taxes.

Response Rates

- For donor acquisition mailings, the response rate is between 0.5 and 2.5 percent.
- For resolicitation mailings, the response rate is between 6 and 12 percent.

Number of Mailings

It usually takes several mailings (between five and nine) to generate a renewal gift. Research shows that most donors set aside the first letter asking them to renew their financial support. The fourth notice in a series motivates donors to use a reply device from one of the earlier mailings. It helps to remind donors that they have given before. Use at least four mailings in your effort to renew. Space the letters five to eight weeks apart. This builds momentum.

Writing an Appeal Letter

The appeal letter should concentrate on the benefits of supporting (or joining) your organization, rather than your organization's needs. Use benefits such as lives saved, human dignity gained, larger causes served, and so on. Use board letterhead. Have only one person sign the letter, using a different color that the rest of the letter. The appeal is a letter from one individual to another. Use "I" and "you"—mostly "you." Your organization addresses human needs on many levels, intangible as well as concrete, emotional as well as practical: write about them.

Write as long a letter as you need to state your case for giving. Two- to four-page letters work better than either one-page letters or very long ones. Use large type and short indented paragraphs (not over seven lines), and highlight important passages or use bold face type—make it easy to read. Use ragged right margins. In long letters, try subheads that are centered.

Write in standard American English. Use short punchy sentences and words that convey emotion. Avoid the use of abbreviations and acronyms. Always include a business reply envelope, a personalized response form, and a postscript—people are more likely to read these than the letter. Ask for the gift in the third or fourth paragraph and repeat the request several times throughout the letter—but don't sound desperate. Ask for money, not for "support." This should not be an afterthought, tacked on to the bottom of the letter. It is your reason for writing. Repeat it several times, and include it on the response form.

Give your readers a reason to respond *now*. Use budget deadlines and matching gifts to prompt a timely response (but don't do this if mailing bulk rate, because it will send a mixed message).

Planning Community Fundraising Events

Local fundraising events that draw on a wide range of community members can help support the day-to-day functioning of the center. In addition, they provide forums in which community members can socialize, thus making fundraising a more enjoyable process. Some events may even become local annual traditions. The center should be able to cover the cost of the event in case funds gathered from it do not cover expenses. All fundraising events take some effort to coordinate—some a lot more than others. Recruiting organizers from the center and the community to coordinate the event can empower participants to use their skills, enhance community ownership of the center, and help get the work done more expediently. These events can become a staple in the community if they are held at a specific time every year and thus can make for a reliable source of donations. The idea is to raise money, raise community awareness, get people involved, and have fun! Don't attempt more than three major fundraisers per year. More than this will exhaust staff members, volunteers, and donors.

Possible Special Events

- **a community function with admission charge**
- **run-, walk-, or bike-a-thon**
- **raffle**
- **golf tournament**
- **penny harvest (a collection at local businesses and corporations)**
- **car wash**

The event will have an impact on how the organization is perceived in the community. When planning an event, consider:

- **Appropriateness:** What does the event says about the organization? If it is the first contact participants have had with the center, what impressions will they walk away with?
- **Timing:** Be sure that there are no other important community events occurring at the same time as the fundraiser.
- **Image:** Choose an event that matches the image of the organization.
- **Volunteer energy:** Avoid asking too much of volunteers and staff members.
- **Repeatability:** Choose an event that can become an annual occasion.
- **Big picture:** Make sure that the special event fits into the center's overall funding plan.

Asking for In-Kind Resources

Many supporters are willing to provide in-kind support and services as well as or in lieu of direct financial assistance. In-kind donations are popular among both individuals and corporations. In-kind donations include noncash donations such as clothing, computers, furniture, food, home renovation supplies, diapers . . . the list is infinite.

To access gifts in kind, you must make potential donors aware of your needs. This can be accomplished through a newsletter, direct mail, the local press, or direct solicitation. Universities, companies, and professional service providers (CPAs, lawyers, etc.) are all potential sources of support, as are neighbors and local merchants.

While individuals generally donate used items, the in-kind donations of corporations range from used office equipment to brand new toys or clothes for program participants. Relationships and partnerships with companies in your community can be an invaluable asset for such donations. It is often easier to obtain in-kind donations than cash grants, but starting such a partnership often leads to cash grants.

There are a number of intermediary organizations that connect nonprofits with in-kind resources from corporations across the country. Gifts in Kind America, of Alexandria, Va., was created by United Way of America in 1985 to assist companies in contributing their products to charities. More than a quarter of a billion dollars worth of products have been distributed through Gifts in Kind America since its inception.

The activities of Gifts in Kind America promote in-kind giving include helping companies design ongoing product-giving programs; distribution management services, which match products with those in need; technical assistance and training for United Way in the development of their programs; and developing information about the product-giving field for use by the media. The Agency Program provides charitable organizations with access to more than $50 million per year in product donations, assistance in operating more efficiently through gifts of office equipment and supplies, and direct contact with over 500 contributing companies. See the resources at the end of this chapter for contact information.

Using Personal Relationships to Access In-Kind Resources

It is not always easy to ask for help or to make our center's needs known. But we must communicate our needs to many people in the hope that eventually the right person will hear our request and provide assistance.

Sometimes the potential donor is two or more steps removed. If a board member or parent participant owns a restaurant, perhaps one of his or her suppliers would donate food for an event. This donation creates good will toward your board member or participant's establishment among the community as well as between the restaurant owner and the supplier.

As with any type of support, to receive in-kind donations, you must identify the needs of your center, identify potential supporters, and make a case for them to provide support.

Tax Issues Related to In-Kind Resources

One reason individuals choose to give in-kind donations is for the tax benefit. When a person or organization donates in-kind resources to the center, an IRS-approved receipt should be given to the donor for future tax credit purposes. This form should include information on what was donated and the value of the item(s) at the time of the donation. The donor and a representative of your agency should sign the form. Give one copy to the donor for tax purposes, and the original should be retained by the agency for tax and auditing purposes. It would be wise to check with an accountant to verify tax laws that may be applicable to your particular state. See the IRS's web site at www.irs.ustreas.gov for further information.

How Our Center Does It

Parent Resource Center

Port Washington, New York

At its annual fundraising Dinner Dance, the PRC honored Jimmy Kallenberg of Jimmy's Shoes as its "Man of the Year." The event, held at the beautiful Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, drew 200 guests (the maximum) and raised over $26,000. Jimmy, a native of Port Washington, was selected for this honor based on his civic contributions.

PRC President Corbey Hyman presented Jimmy with an award for his great community service. Jimmy told the attendees, "I was taught by my father: you must give, in order to get back." He went on to thank everyone involved, with special thanks to his wife, Sharon.

This year's Dinner Dance was the most profitable since the inception of the fundraiser six years ago, thanks in large part to the efforts of the event's chairwomen, Toni Ann Nahas and Anne Knife, and Halime Berkay, Dinner Dance Journal Chairperson. A $16,000 profit was realized from the Journal alone.

The event was well-supported by area merchants. Silent auction and balloon sale items were donated by such businesses as Painting With Flowers, Ahyan's Mediterranean Market, Main St. Market, Sands Point Jewelry, Peppermint Stick, Yamaguchi, Lord & Taylor, and many others. Fred and Peggy Falconer of S.F. Falconer's Florist donated beautiful flower arrangements for the tables. Patty Vunk and Robin Ryan of Dolphin Books gave well-known children's books for table prizes. The Omeltchenkos of Port Washington donated a Florida vacation. Manhattan photographer David Heinlein volunteered his photography services throughout the evening.

The proceeds from the dinner dance will allow the PRC to continue to provide classes and support to young families in Port Washington and the surrounding communities.

It's not too early to start thinking about the year 2000's Gold Coast Gala! If you are interested in helping or serving on a committee, we're taking names right now! Call the PRC to volunteer or check the proper place on the membership form.

Book Fair

Mark your calendars for the annual Book Fair to be held on Friday, October 29th, 10 am–12 pm (at the same time as the Halloween Party)! The event will again feature books and educational materials from Scholastic, and Clifford the Big Red Dog will be our special guest. Great photo opportunity! We will also feature Discovery Toys, Mary Kay Cosmetics, and more. Get your holiday shopping done early and conveniently. There will be childcare and children's activities while you shop. Call the PRC if you can help. Here's your chance to get your volunteer hours out of the way early in the year! (Volunteer hours can be substituted for membership fees at the PRC.)

Continued

Progressive Dinner
Watch for your invitation to the 4th annual Progressive Dinner, to be held on Saturday, November 13th. This event is great fun and very affordable. We start with cocktails at a host home, where we draw lots to see who goes where for dinner. Then, we all meet at a third home for dessert and coffee. We need eight to ten host homes. So if you can volunteer your house, please call the PRC or chairwomen Julie Hamick, 222-2222, or Chris Jenkinson, 333-3333.

Pampered Chef Party
On June 10th, the PRC participated in a Pampered Chef party hosted by Bonni Calabrese, a Pampered Chef representative. Bonni demonstrated many beautiful kitchen products and tools. Participants delighted in the many delectable treats made with these items. All who attended had a wonderful time we plan to hold another party some time this fall. Invitations will be mailed to PRC members.

Pasta Sale
Purchase packages of specially shaped pasta at the PRC: pumpkins, sports equipment, and much more. Only $3.00 a package and you have a great dinner that benefits the PRC too!

Grants/Fund Raising—Help Needed
The PRC is constantly seeking financial aid from corporations, private foundations, and fraternal organizations. This funding is essential to our Outreach Program, which provides parent education and assistance to low-income and minority families in Port Washington. There are many organizations out there that could provide support and we need to find them.

If you, a family member, or a friend belong to such an organization, or know of a private foundation we could approach in this effort, call Grants Chairwoman Laura Marks at 444-4444.

50/50 Raffle
The PRC sells raffle tickets throughout the year, with the winning ticket drawn at the annual Dinner Dance. Half the proceeds go to the winning ticket holder and half to PRC. The tickets are sold at events such as the Book Fair and holiday parties. Someone is needed to organize and coordinate ticket sales. If you are interested, please call the PRC or put a check in the appropriate place on the membership form.

Burger King Night
You have to eat, right? Why not make a night of it at Burger King and help the PRC too? The PRC will receive a percentage of all the income generated at the Port Washington Burger King from 5–8 pm on Monday, October 4th.

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Using For-Profit Activities As A Funding Source

Billing Third-Party Payers

Insurance companies and government-provided insurance (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid, or CHIP) may reimburse a center for its services if they fall into categories covered under these plans. (These types of funding are also explored under the "Federal, State, and Local Funding" section above.) Centers that offer mental health counseling, home visiting nurses for the elderly or expectant mothers, or other health services on site may qualify for reimbursement. For more information about qualifying for third-party payments, contact the Federal Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) or your private insurer.

Charging a Fee for Service

Sometimes, instituting participation fees for use of center services may be appropriate. Assessing fees can increase participants' sense of ownership and responsibility, as well as make providers more accountable for what they provide. These fees can be graduated according to participants' income level, can be requested per unit of service utilized, or can be an overall "membership fee" for a certain period of time. Offer participants other ways to compensate the center besides paying cash, such as providing services like helping with a program or cleaning up. Fees alone rarely cover the cost of providing the service, so they should be seen as a supplement to other sources of funding. Your center should be prepared for some of the more challenging aspects of gathering funds in this way. Consider ahead of time what the consequences will be if a person stops paying fees. Also, sliding fee scales may stigmatize those who pay less. There are many strategies for charging fees successfully (Lohman 1980).

How Our Center Does It

The Parent Resource Center

Port Washington, New York

The PRC requires all participants to register as members once a year. Members pay $50.00 and are asked to volunteer four hours per year with the center. They can pay an additional $50.00 and waive the volunteer requirement. The membership form includes lots of specific activities or committees that members can sign up for to fulfill their volunteer requirement. It also includes a space where members can specify specific talents, interests, or services they would like to contribute. In addition to membership, the PRC charges specific fees for classes and field trips. The PRC has a scholarship policy and will waive membership and class fees for those in need.

Entrepreneurial Activities

Increasingly, nonprofits are turning to entrepeneurial activities as a source of revenue. Entrepeneurial activities can be a great way to involve participants in helping to ensure that the center has the fiscal support to keep providing services. In addition, they can give participants an opportunity to build their skills and to learn about running a business. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of entrepeneurial activities that the center can engage in. Convene a committee of participants and staff to brainstorm ideas for your center. Possibilities include:

- Have a drawing or photography contest for the kids in your program. Turn the winning entries into the design for a series of note cards and ask participants to help sell them.
- Turn a support group into a knitting or quilting club. Participants can work while they talk, and the products can be sold or raffled off.
- Partner with local artists and craftspeople to show their work on consignment.
- Sell advertising space in your newsletter.
- Rent out center space for community events.
- Sell services. Is one of your participants or staff members an excellent photographer? Offer to have him or her take photos at a community event for a fee.

Building Ongoing Relationships with Funders

After the funding organization has received your proposal, they must review it and make a decision. Grant review procedures vary widely and may take anywhere from several weeks to several months. Do not hesitate to ask the grantmaker about their anticipated response time. During this time, as the grant seeker, you should be patient but persistent. Should the funder request additional information, provide it as promptly as possible. At the same time, if the funder has indicated that you will be notified in a certain amount of time as to the status of your proposal, and you have not been contacted within that timeframe, contact them!

Should your hard work pay off and you receive the grant, be certain to send a letter of thanks to acknowledge the funder's support. You will also need to clarify specifics about reporting expectations—forms to be used and deadlines for submissions, to avoid confusion and misunderstanding at a later time.

If there are any problems in implementing the proposed plan, inform your funder as soon as possible. Generally, funders are flexible and accept alternative ways of addressing the problem if they are notified in advance. Should you have to change the program for any reason, your initial 12-month progress report *should not* be the funder's first notice of that fact.

If your request is rejected and you are unclear as to the reason, do not hesitate to ask. This is an ideal opportunity to learn from any mistakes that you made. Also, this may be a perfect opportunity to cultivate a relationship with this prospective funder. Place them on your mailing list to keep them updated of your agency's work and progress throughout the year. Remember, next year you may need funding for a new project or additional funding for current projects, so keep the door open.

Worksheet 1: Fundraising Plan

Funding Source	Action(s) Needed	Individual(s) Responsible	Timeline
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	•	•	•

Worksheet 2: Funder Profile

Funder Name: ______________________

Funder Type:

( ) Individual
( ) Corporate foundation
( ) Community foundation
( ) Business or corporation
( ) Private foundation
( ) Family foundation

Funder Contact:

Name: ______________________
Address: ______________________
____
____
Phone: __________ Fax: __________
E-mail: __________ Web: __________

Funding Priorities

Priority issue areas: ______________________

Target populations: ______________________

Geographic focus: ______________________

Funding restrictions: ______________________

Giving Information

Average grant size: ____

Giving timeline: ____

Request submission protocols: ____

Contact History

Previous proposal submitted? ( ) No

( ) Yes* ( ) Accepted ( ) Rejected

* attach copies of any previous proposal and/or correspondence

Describe other contact history: ____

Name of center staff person who made previous contact: ____

Name of other funder staff person contacted: ____

Legal Restrictions on Fundraising by State

The following list of registration requirements for charitable organizations soliciting funding is provided by the AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy. In some states, there are additional requirements that must be met by individuals who are paid for the purpose of raising funds; therefore, the chart also indicates whether additional information is required regarding such individuals.

State	*Requirements for charitable organizations*	*Additional information required for paid solicitors*
Alabama	Registration requested (not required by law)	No
Alaska	Annual Registration, no fee	Yes
Arizona	Annual Registration, no fee	Yes
Arkansas	Annual Registration	Yes
California	Initial registration for organizations located or doing business in the state. Over 200 cities and counties have solicitation ordinances that may require registration.	Yes
Colorado	Organizations employing professional solicitors must file solicitation' notice prior to each campaign, $62.50 fee.	No
Connecticut	Initial registration, $20 fee. Accepts uniform registration form.	Yes
Deleware	None	No
DC	Licensing is $80 per year.	No
Florida	Annual registration. Fees range from $10 to $400 based on receipts.	Yes
Georgia	$25 registration fee	Yes
Hawaii	Annual registration, $20 fee	Yes
Idaho	None	No
Illinois	Initial registration	Yes
Indiana	Organizations located in the state must register with the Department of Revenue, not-for-profit division.	Yes
Iowa	None	Yes
Kansas	Annual registration, $20 fee	Yes
Kentucky	Registration annually by filing IRS Form 990. Organizations with no 990 should submit uniform registration form.	Yes
Louisiana	Registration prior to campigns for organizations using professional solicitors.	Yes
Maine	Initial registration, $40 fee. State will issue renewal.	Yes
Maryland	Annual registration, $50 to $200 fee depending on proceeds. No fee if proceeds are less than $25,000 and no professional solicitor is used.	Yes
Massachusetts	Annual registration, $35 to $250 fee depending on proceeds. Uniform registration form accepted in limited cases.	Yes
Michigan	Annual licensing, no fee. Uniform registration form accepted with state addendum.	Yes
Minnesota	Annual registration, $25 fee	Yes

State	*Requirements for charitable organizations*	*Additional information required for paid solicitors*
Mississippi	Annual registration, $50 fee	Yes
Missouri	Annual registration, $15 fee. 501(c)(3) organizations are exempt from registration.	Yes
Montana	None	No
Nebraska	Annual registration, $10 fee. Accepts uniform registration form.	No
Nevada	No fund-raising registration. Foreign nonprofit corporations must qualify before doing business in Nevada.	No
New Hampshire	One-time registration, $25 fee	Yes
New Jersey	Annual registration, $30 to $250, depending on receipts	Yes
New Mexico	Annual registration	No
New York	Initial registration	Yes
North Carolina	Annual registration, $50 to $200 fee based on receipts. Parent organizations filing on behalf of chapters or affiliates. $100 to $400 fee based on number of chapters.	Yes
North Dakota	Annual registration, $25 fee	Yes
Ohio	Annual registration for out-of-state charities and Ohio organizations not already registered under the state's Truct Act. $50 to $200 fee, depending upon amount of contributions received in state	Yes
Oklahoma	Annual registration. $15 fee. Accepts uniform registration form.	Yes
Oregon	Initial registration	Yes
Pennsylvania	Annual registration, $15 to $250 fee depending on contributions.	Yes
Rhode Island	Annual registration, $75 fee. Accepts uniform registration form with state addendum.	Yes
South Carolina	Annual registration, $50 fee. Accepts uniform registration form	Yes
South Dakota	None	No
Tennessee	Initial annual registration, $50 fee; thereafter fee ranges from $50 to $200 depending upon receipts.	Yes
Texas	Annual registration for public-safty organizations and veteran's Groups, $150 to $250 fee. Bonding required of veteran's groups.	Yes
Utah	Annual registration, $100 fee	Yes
Vermont	None	Yes
Virginia	Annual registration, $30 to $325 fee based on previous year's receipts. Initial registration may require $100 surcharge. Accepts uniform registration form.	Yes
Washington	Annual registration, $20 fee	Yes
West Virginia	Annual registration, $15 to $50 fee depending on receipts	Yes
Wisconsin	Initial registration, $15 fee	Yes
Wyoming	None	No

For additional information regarding charitable standards, contact the Council of Better Business Bureaus' Philanthropic Advisory Service at 703/276-0100.

Resources

Publications

Beyond Fundraising: New Strategies for Nonprofit Innovation and Investment
By K. S. Grace. 1997. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Building Villages to Raise Our Children: Funding and Resources
By J. Fay, J. Gilbert, and K. Wrean 1995. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Financing Child Care In The United States: An Illustrative Catalog of Current Strategies
By A. Mitchell, L. Stony, and H. Ditcher. 1997. Kansas City, Mo.: The Ewing Marion Kaufman Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Financing Family Support Centers
By M. Westheimer and S. Watson. 2000. Forthcoming. Washington D.C.: The Finance Project.

Fundraising for Social Change
By K. Klein. 1988. Inverness, Calif.: Chardon Press.

Directories

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
Washington, D.C.: Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Staff (MOVES)

Foundation Directory
New York: The Foundation Center

Organizations

Council on Foundations
1828 L Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202/466-6512
www.cof.org

Donors Forum
208 South LaSalle Street
Suite 740 (Library, Suite 735)
Chicago, IL 60604
Phone: 312/578-0090
Fax: 312/578-0103
www.donorsforum.org/

The Finance Project
1000 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/628-4200
Fax: 202/628-4205
www.financeproject.org
The Foundation Center
79 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10003-3076
Phone: 212/620-4230
www.fdncenter.org/

Gifts in Kind America
Dept. F
700 N. Fairfax St., Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703/836-2121

National Charities Information Bureau
19 Union Square West
New York, NY 10003
Phone: 212/929-6300
Fax: 212/463-7083
www.ncib.org

Nonprofit Financial Center
111 W. Washington Ave., Suite 1221
Chicago IL 60602
Phone: 312/606.8250
Fax: 312/606.0241
www.nonprofitfinancial.org/

Nonprofit GENIE
706 Mission Street, 5th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415/543-9000
Fax: 415/543-7708
www.genie.org/

On-Line Resources

Community Foundation Locator
www.cof.org/community/index.html

The Department of Health and Human Services
www.hhs.gov

Foundation Finder
lnp.fdncenter.org/finder.html

Internet Nonprofit Center
www.nonprofits.org/

The Internet Prospector
w3.uwyo.edu/~prospect/index.html

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Chapter 12

Organizational Structure

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of a family support center can take a variety of forms. A center may choose to incorporate in its state and municipality, or it may choose to remain under the direction of another larger agency. A center can be:

- an independent, incorporated not-for-profit entity
- a unit of a larger not-for-profit organization
- a program of a government agency

The structure that you choose must be the one that best serves the mission and goals of your family support center. The structure should flow from the strategic and program planning processes, as described in previous chapters.

In this chapter, issues surrounding the organizational auspices (independent organization versus affiliate program, public versus private) and the legal, financial, and regulatory requirements of establishing a family support center are considered. More detailed information about incorporation and nonprofit status is discussed, as they are universal concerns. Other legal and regulatory issues are cited for consideration but are not covered in detail because they vary widely depending on location.

In making these organizational decisions, it is helpful and sometimes necessary to consult with a number of experts, such as the following:

- personnel of other family support centers and similar agencies who can share their experiences with different organizational auspices
- the anticipated participants in the family support center
- lawyers with not-for-profit expertise (especially with respect to personnel issues)
- insurance agents who are familiar with and deal with not-for-profit organizations
- accountants who are familiar with not-for-profit accounting requirements and can provide information on necessary organizational audits
- state and municipality personnel who can provide information on zoning requirements, licensing issues (i.e., kitchen inspections, day care licensing, etc.), and incorporation guidelines

Organizational Forms

Your family support center has three options of organizational structure from which to choose. The first is the *independent, not-for-profit organization*. While this option can provide the center the maximum autonomy in making programmatic decisions, it also may be the most challenging status to obtain. Filing for incorporation need not be terribly time-consuming. Someone with legal expertise must be consulted, and the details of organizational governance processes must be spelled out. However, obtaining not-for-profit [501 (c)(3)] status can take quite a bit of time, sometimes up to two years, and in the interim, the organization is not eligible to receive charitable contributions or receive grants from grantmakers. Thus, new organizations seeking this status should consider establishing an arrangement with an established not-for-profit organization willing to act as the new organization's fiscal agent until not-for-profit status is obtained.

Second is the *affiliate or unit of an established not-for-profit organization.* Although decision-making is not as autonomous in such an arrangement (the host or parent organization holds ultimate authority over programming and financial decisions), having such an umbrella organization can (but does not always) free staff time that would have been spent in fundraising, financial accounting, insurance, benefits, legal issues, and so on. When considering a host organization, be sure to evaluate carefully its family support orientation. If the organization does not exercise family-supportive practice itself, also evaluate its willingness to support this practice in the new affiliate. Make sure all agreements regarding organizational processes are made up front and agreed to by all the necessary parties. Issues addressed should include roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, communication, and conflict resolution. (These issues are addressed in the later section on fiduciary agents.) If the program is a natural outgrowth or evolution of an existing organization, some of these decisions will be made over time, rather than up front.

Third is the *program of a public, governmental agency.* Again, it is important to clarify the decision-making process and oversight for the center and its resources. Some benefits of working under the auspices of a public, governmental agency are that it may be able to combine funding streams and resources and may have a broad mandate, e.g., public health (to serve all families in the county) or education (to serve all children in the school district). However, this organizational form may restrict flexibility and impose bureaucratic constraints, and it may require that your center have a separate account or entity for private fundraising.

Legal, Financial, and Regulatory Requirements

Your family support center's legal, financial, and regulatory requirements depend on the organizational auspice chosen. In examining and planning for these requirements, it is imperative to consult with a lawyer to gain a complete picture of the organization's legal obligations.

Articles of Incorporation

Articles of incorporation are the legal basis for the independent family support center. To receive monies from grant agencies (such as private foundations and some government agencies), the center needs to be a nonprofit corporation or be able to funnel the funds through a not-for-profit entity. When drafting the articles of incorporation, it is important to keep in mind the IRS regulations for tax-exempt status. Using language that explicitly describes the nonprofit intentions of the organization in the articles of incorporation makes applying for 501(c)(3) status possible. Applications for incorporation can be obtained from the secretary of state's office. Many states can provide sample applications for incorporation.

First Steps

Choosing a Corporate Name
The family support center's name cannot be one already being used by an international corporation doing business in-state or by another corporation that has already registered an exclusive right to that particular name. No name is allowed to include the words "regular democrat," "regular democratic," "regular republican," "democrat," "republican" or any others that would imply endorsement by any established political party, unless consent is given. Be careful to choose a name that reflects the purpose of the organization as set out by the articles of incorporation. Words used in the name should not convey any type of profit-seeking motive.

If there are any questions about the name, contact the secretary of state. In most states, organizations must register their names, for a small fee, before finishing the corporation application. The office with which you register informs the center if the chosen name is already being used. If the articles of incorporation are not filed within a specific period, the name does not maintain its reserved status. You may reapply as many times as necessary (for another fee) to continue to hold the name for an extended period of time. When a group decides to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) organization, one of its principal responsibilities is to choose a name. The Grantsmanship Center, which may be contacted at www.tgci.com/publications/96summer/whatname.htm, helps groups think about this decision.

Duration

When filing for corporation status, the duration of the center must be stated. The answer to this question is usually "perpetual" unless the articles of incorporation specify otherwise.

Purpose

The purpose statement outlines the exact function or character of an organization. Be extremely careful when choosing the wording for the purpose statement, always keeping in mind the center's goals. Be as specific as possible without being too limiting to future growth. A list of acceptable purposes for a nonprofit organization can be obtained through the secretary of state's office.

Example: Specific Purpose Statement

This sample is for a community health care clinic for low-income individuals.

> **Article 3: The purposes for which this corporation is organized are:**
> **to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of family-oriented health care aimed primarily at the medically underserved areas of (city and county).**

Mancuso 1997

Powers

Not-for-profit corporations are incorporated by the state, while the federal government grants tax-exempt status. State tax exemption may then be sought. Not-for-profit corporations have the right to sue, be sued, complain, and defend in the corporate name; to have and affix a corporate seal; to purchase, lease, acquire, hold, use, own, or otherwise deal in and with any real property; to make contracts and incur liability; to make and alter bylaws; and to exercise all powers necessary to carry out all the purposes of the organization.

Directors and Officers

The directors are legally, financially, and morally responsible for the corporation. A corporation must have a certain number of directors, determined by each state. The state often specifies a minimum number and a residential requirement for the directors. If the corporation wants to add to the director's requirements, it may do so in the "other provisions" section of the articles of incorporation, or in the bylaws of the corporation. Usually, though, these are included in the bylaws—articles of incorporation are as simple and direct as possible.

The director and officers must act reasonably in the execution of their fiduciary responsibilities. In so doing, they are protected from individual liability. The corporation shields the officers and the director and should protect itself with liability insurance.

Incorporators
An incorporator is the person who signs and delivers the articles of incorporation to the secretary of state or corporations commission. There can be one or more incorporator, whose qualifications are established by the state. Once the articles of incorporation have been delivered, the incorporators, duties are finished. Often, an incorporator takes on additional duties as an initial director.

Membership Procedures
If the family support center plans to be a membership organization, the articles of incorporation should state that there are plans for a membership program. The exact qualifications for membership should be outlined in the bylaws, not in the articles of incorporation. Bylaws are more flexible than the articles of incorporation and thus are more practical for defining the membership system, which can be subject to change and revision over time.

Other Provisions
Under this section, it may be advisable to list specifications of membership, director qualifications, officer qualifications, or duties of officials in the organization. These types of issues can also be addressed in the bylaws. In order to change any provisions in the bylaws, there must be an established vote minimum, which is governed by the corporate law of each state.

Filing the Articles of Incorporation

Two copies of the articles of incorporation should be delivered to the secretary of state's office, where the application is reviewed. If the application is approved, a dated copy, which is one of the two copies provided of the articles of incorporation, along with a certificate of incorporation, is sent to the incorporator or the incorporator's representative.

The certificate of incorporation and a copy of the articles of incorporation must be filed with the county recorder of deeds in order to finalize the process. This information must be supplied to the recorder of deeds within 15 days after the documents have been received from the secretary of state, or as soon as possible.

Other Components of Incorporation

Establishing Bylaws
The bylaws serve as the practical set of rules for the organization. The bylaws should include instructions on holding meetings, electing directors, and other important organizational procedures. Because the bylaws are the working foundation of the organization, family support centers should incorporate family support principles into the process of creating and implementing the bylaws. Sometimes the process of creating bylaws can be a drawn-out, challenging task, if done in a truly democratic inclusive manner. Initial bylaws can be drafted with family support principles and revised biannually to reflect the growth and development of the organization. (Further directions on creating bylaws are available in some of the resources listed at the end of this chapter.)

Federal Employer Identification Number

The next step is to file for Federal Employer Identification Numbers (FEIN). Even though the organization may not need these documents immediately, it is better to have them on file than to have to get them on short notice. This number allows the corporation to employ staff. (The center also must fill out IRS Form SS-4.)

Maintaining Corporation Status

Each nonprofit organization must file an annual report to the secretary of state and the attorney general. The due date depends on state regulations. Check with the secretary of state to find out the center's deadline. Failure to file an annual report with the secretary of state can result in termination of the corporation, and failure to file with the attorney general can result in substantial financial penalties.

Other offices, such as the Internal Revenue Service or the state department of revenue, also require filings. The number of annual reports that must be filed depends largely on the tax-exempt status of the organization.

Minutes of the first board of directors meeting must be kept on file. The best way to ensure that nothing important gets lost in the shuffle is to make a corporation file. Keeping a record of all corporation papers helps ensure that the organization meets corporation requirements. Incorporation is a process requiring yearly renewal. Staying incorporated takes effort on the part of the center.

The secretary of state should receive a change notice if anything from the original application changes. These changes include a change in corporation name, duration, or purpose; change of address; or change of officers. If a merger, dissolution, or reinstatement occurs, proper forms should also be filed with the secretary of state.

Consult personnel from the secretary of state's office and a lawyer to gain more information on the incorporation process and requirements.

Tax Exemption

After starting the incorporation process, the first issue a family support center should address is whether it is eligible for federal 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. 501(c)(3) status provides many benefits to a nonprofit organization. First, as a 501(c)(3), the center does not have to pay taxes, leaving more money to spend on direct services to families. Second, being tax-exempt makes the fundraising process easier because contributors can take a tax deduction for their donations. Third, fundraising and marketing are further eased by the center's being eligible to use bulk mail rates to publish and distribute materials. Fourth, being a 501(c)(3) corporation makes the center eligible to receive public and private grants (although more and more government agencies are contracting with for-profit entities). Finally, having federal 501(c)(3) status also determines the center's tax exempt status at the state level.

Preparing to apply for tax-exemption is an important first step, because this status determines most of the organization's financial status and future legal requirements. In order to be 501(c)(3) eligible, an organization must meet certain standards set by the IRS. Most family support centers qualify. You may check with IRS Publication 557, "How to Apply for and Retain Exempt Status for Your Organization" for specific qualifications.

Questions to Address in Preparation

The tax exemption and incorporation process will be easier after gathering the answers to the following questions:

- What are the organization's vision, mission, and goals?
- What needs will the organization try to meet?
- What activities will the organization take on to accomplish its mission?
- What unique contribution will the organization make?
- How will the organization finance its activities?
- Who will be involved as board, staff, advisors and volunteers?

Important Forms for Tax Exemption

Publication 557: How to Apply for and Retain Exempt Status for Your Organization

Form 8718: User Fee for Tax-Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request

Form SS-4: Application for Employer Identification Number

Package 1023: Application for Recognition of Exemption with Instructions

Circular E and Employers Supplemental Tax Guide: Guides employers on personnel taxes, with special instructions for 501(c)(3) organizations.

These and other important forms can be downloaded from www.irs.ustreas.gov.

Filing for Tax Exemption with the IRS

Filing for 501(c)(3) status can be a long process, but it is well worth the benefits. The IRS estimates that the entire filing process should take approximately 14 to 15 hours. Along with all the required IRS forms, copies of the approved articles of incorporation (see the previous section), certificate of incorporation, the corporate by-laws, and any other requested materials (e.g., statistics to back the center's position, examples of the type of work the center performs, or a statement from the families the center serves) should be sent to the IRS district office in the center's area. (To obtain address and contact information, see the IRS 8718 User Fee Form.)

If the IRS rejects the application for tax-exemption, the organization must file and pay taxes on the IRS's set dates. Whether the organization must pay state taxes also depends on the IRS. State tax-exemption information can be looked up individually on the Internet or at local libraries. Consult both a lawyer and an accountant to gain more information on tax exemption.

Other General Regulatory Issues

The family support center must address the following issues:

- zoning (see the appropriate local government agency)
- licensing for staff or for facilities (see the appropriate local and/or state government agencies)
- financial management (consult a lawyer about legal requirements and an accountant to set up and maintain appropriate financial management systems)
- insurance for the organization (consult with a lawyer for legal requirements and with an insurance agent with expertise in insurance for not-for-profits)
- certification of staff (see the appropriate local or state government agency)
- security checks on childcare workers (see the appropriate local or state government agencies)

Governance and Fiscal Entities

The Board of Directors

Each independent not-for-profit organization that is incorporated is required by law to have a board of directors. The board is legally and financially responsible for the program, its activities, and its management of funds. Board responsibilities typically include fundraising; reviewing and approving the program's budget, long-range plans and goals, and operating policies; managing its finances; overseeing contractual obligations; protecting against risk and imprudent decisions; and hiring and reviewing the performance of the program's executive director. More important, the board is responsible for nurturing the program in its earliest stages and helping it grow. Board members provide leadership and direction to the new program, writing bylaws and volunteering time and energy to the program's first activities. For these reasons, board members should be chosen with care.

Desirable Board Member Qualities

Board members who are part of the family support center's start-up team should possess special qualities that facilitate the organization's challenging first years of operation. A few "true believers" should be included who can inspire others, raise morale, and promote the new organization to grantmakers and other potential funders. People who have skills in starting a nonprofit organization and/or the willingness to learn are highly desirable. Understanding family support philosophy and practice—especially how it pertains to board procedures—is another important quality to seek in members. Board members should have the ability to keep the issues and interests of families and the community in which they live ever present in the development of the program. In the critical beginning stages of the organization, board members must allocate sufficient time to develop the organization's vision. Last, but not least, board members who are involved with the start-up should be patient, supportive, and persevering.

As the family support center grows and becomes more established, the board of directors should expand to incorporate new members and a more diverse representation from the community. The number of participant family members participating as board members should increase. Also, representation from the community and different sectors of influence should broaden. Knowledge of family support should be cultivated among old and new members as the board grows. As with start-up board members, new members must also possess the ability to keep the issues and interests of families and the community in which they live ever present in the development of the program. Finally, new board members (who are not necessarily chosen for preexisting governance knowledge and skills) should be offered opportunities to develop the skills they need to govern the family support center.

Elaborating Structures and Processes

As representation on the board expands and the family support center becomes established, it is necessary to build more structures into board operations. Start by establishing leadership roles (e.g., the president or chair) and conducting elections. Also develop committees with responsibility for financial oversight, fundraising, board recruitment, community relations, program evaluation, and so on. Individual board members and committees should work together to establish a system for overall program planning and for program evaluation. Duties may include areas such as board recruitment, program director evaluation, obtaining ongoing input from participants and staff, financial reporting, budgeting, and communications with participants, staff, and the community about board decisions. It is imperative to maintain records of board decisions and minutes from board meetings for audits and legal responsibility.

Recommendations for Board Success and Pitfalls to Avoid

- Recruit members who are genuinely interested in the program and can make the time commitment to working on the board. Don't recruit too many "big names" who have limited time to devote to the program.
- Recruit members who bring diverse perspectives and experiences and who represent different constituencies. Avoid creating a board full of people who are all from the same background or circle. (Nonprofit status requires a broad and inclusive view of community.)
- Insure that family representatives are able to actively participate on the board by removing barriers (e.g., those involving the time or location of meetings, childcare, meals, transportation, and reimbursement of expenses incurred during board activities). If necessary, provide training in board procedures, understanding a financial statement, and/or leadership.
- Make use of the individual skills and expertise of each board member. Don't expect all board members to contribute in the same way.
- Be practical about how many tasks and functions the board can accomplish at one time. Set priorities. Avoid setting up too many committees or overloading a few with too many responsibilities.
- Respect board members' other commitments and obligations (e.g., jobs, family). Avoid excessive time demands—they are volunteers.
- Be very clear about what is expected from board members. Express to them the commitment and responsibilities involved fully.
- Establish a clear understanding of the board's role in governance and oversight. Be clear about the program director's role in program operation and leadership. Ensure that there is a clear understanding about the responsibilities of board members and those of staff. Avoid micromanagement of program operations by board members.

The Executive or Steering Committee

Nonprofit boards are usually led by an executive committee or steering committee composed of a small number of members who handle decisions that must be made between board meetings. In some centers, this committee is responsible for all the ordinary activities of the board, such as taxes, liability, and compliance issues. In others, such concerns are handled by paid program staff. Some programs give the executive committee the power to make important decisions, while others utilize the committee as an advisory group whose recommendations must be approved by the larger board. Whichever direction is taken, the authority and responsibilities of the executive committee should be clearly communicated, preferably in the program's bylaws. Executive committees are typically composed of a president or chair, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Many include the previous president, and some include the president-elect. Officers can be chosen through either a general membership vote or a vote of the board of directors.

- Be clear about how board members communicate with program staff (other than the director) and likewise how staff (other than the director) communicate with the board.

- Provide adequate orientation and staff support as needed for board activities.

- Make sure that there are meaningful roles for all board members and recognition of their efforts.

- Keep your eyes on the prize. Stay focused on what the center is interested in achieving—outcomes—and organize the board to support the program's ability to be successful. Don't get distracted by personal agendas or opportunities that fall outside the mission of the family support center.

- Keep board members up-to-date about program developments, issues, and needs. Seek the board's counsel on matters of policy. Don't wait until there is a crisis to bring the board into problem solving and planning.

Advisory Committees

Establishing an advisory committee provides the family support center with an additional mechanism to meet its goals. An advisory committee differs from a board of directors in that it is less bound by formal rules and regulations. For instance, an advisory committee may be established for a single purpose, such as a capital campaign (fundraising) or planning for a specific project.

Advisory committees can be set up to ensure focused input for a specific program. For example, a childcare advisory committee of parents can be established to work on projects specifically related to only the childcare services, or a youth advisory committee can ensure the inclusion of youth perspectives in the family support center. Advisory committees are also developed when specific skills are needed to complement the board; for instance, when building a new building, conducting strategic planning, and so on. It is important when establishing an advisory committee to make clear the purpose of the work group, the lines of communication and responsibility to the board and the director, and how ideas should be shared among these three entities.

In essence, the advisory committee serves at the discretion of the family support center staff and board of directors. A center may have a number of advisory committees at one time, each established to accomplish a particular goal of the organization. Once the goal has been realized and the work of the advisory committee completed, it may be disbanded or redirected to serve additional needs of the center. Advisory committees do not assume the legal responsibilities of the board of directors. Rather, they assist the organization in the furthering of the mission.

Advisory committees provide additional resources and an opportunity to offer a short-term commitment to the center. They allow a greater number of individuals to become involved in the workings of the center and therefore increase awareness of the family support center among a larger number of constituents.

Fiduciary Agent

Definition: *A person or entity that is legally obliged to discharge faithfully a responsibility of trust toward another (e.g., guardian-ward, parent-child, lawyer-client)* (The New Columbia Encyclopedia 1975. New York: Columbia University Press).

As explored in the introduction of this chapter, family support centers may choose from a variety of organizational auspices. Fiduciary agent relationships come into play for new independent organizations that do not yet have 501(c)(3) status; for programs that are affiliated with larger, more established organizations; and for programs that are units or components of larger organizations.

Sharing Ideas Among the Board, Advisory Committee, and Director

- Have an advisory committee representative at board meetings.
- Have a board representative at advisory committee meetings.
- Include information about advisory committee's work in newsletters and other communications to keep people aware of their accomplishments.
- Set up a listserv discussion about pertinent issues.
- Share the minutes of different groups' meetings at others' meetings.
- Make sure that word gets back to parents, center participants, and staff members about the work of these different groups.

- **A new independent program** may have a relationship with another not-for-profit that acts solely as the fiscal (or fiduciary) agent for the program until the not-for-profit [501(c)(3)] status is obtained. This process can take up to two years to finalize. A newly incorporated program cannot receive funds directly from a foundation or other charitable sources unless the gift is given directly to a 501(c)(3) organization. Also, until the 501(c)(3) status is obtained, a family support program receiving donations directly is expected to pay taxes on gifts and donations. The fiscal agent agrees to oversee the financial assets of the family support center, pays the bills and payroll, and includes the financial activities of the program within its own annual audit.

- **An affiliate of an established organization** is a type of fiduciary relationship in which overall governance responsibilities are shared. For example, Jane Adams Center of Hull House Association has its own board of directors, independence in determining what programs and services to offer, and responsibility for raising most of its own operating funds. Hull House Association negotiates contracts with the City of Chicago, maintains a relationship with United Way, and manages all of the financial bookkeeping, employee benefits, payroll and insurance, legal issues, capital building, and maintenance.

- **A unit or program within a larger organization** has a different fiduciary relationship with the parent organization. This type of program has no local board of directors but may have an advisory committee responsible to the larger organization's board of directors (see previous section on advisory committees). The staff reports directly to the administration of the larger entity. Fundraising and governance are primarily the responsibility of the parent organization. The decision for the family support center to become independent once it is stable and capable may be made from the onset of the creation of the center or several years into operations.

In navigating the fiduciary agent/family support center relationship, it is recommended that efforts be made to:

- clarify as specifically as possible the relationship between the parent, fiduciary, or fiscal agent organization and the family support center, including the roles of each, the division of responsibilities, and decision-making authority
- establish a means for regular communication and reporting
- establish a mechanism to resolve disagreements or problems before problems arise
- designate primary contact persons who act as liaisons to each other's organizations or units
- establish regular annual or semiannual dates to review relationship and effectiveness or efficacy
- engage in joint planning or sharing of plans

The more responsibilities the parent or fiduciary entity has in the relationship, the more influence it has on the development of the center. Over time, there will be changes in personnel, goals, and direction of each of the entities; growth or reduction in programming and financial resources; and changes in the community needs or concerns. The clearer the terms in which the relationship is spelled out, the more often agendas are shared or at least on the table, and the more communication occurs regularly, the greater the degree to which both entities benefit from the relationship. Trust and respect are paramount.

Worksheet 1: Incorporation Checklist

☐ Order materials from the secretary of state's office.

☐ Choose a corporate name.

☐ Check name availability.

☐ Reserve the corporate name.

☐ Perform a name search.

☐ Protect the name.

☐ Prepare articles of incorporation.

☐ File articles of incorporation.

☐ Prepare bylaws.

☐ Prepare membership provisions.

☐ Prepare and file federal tax exemption application.

☐ Obtain state corporate income tax exemption.

☐ Set up a corporate records book.

☐ Prepare minutes of first board of directors meeting.

☐ Place minutes and attachments in corporate records book.

☐ File assumed business name statement.

☐ Apply for federal nonprofit mailing permit.

☐ Apply for property tax exemptions.

☐ File corporate report form.

☐ Register with attorney general.

☐ Comply with political reporting requirements.

☐ Prepare assignments of leases and deeds.

☐ File final papers for prior organization (existing groups only).

☐ Notify others of your incorporation (existing groups only).

This checklist shows only the major steps in starting a nonprofit corporation. Please refer to instructions provided by the IRS, the secretary of state's office, and publications and organizations listed in the resources section at the end of this chapter for further instructions and details.

Worksheet 2: What to Look for in a Board Member

Specific People

☐ **Expert in family support philosophy and practice:** Individual who understands family support thoroughly and can apply it easily to board procedures

Who meets this description:

☐ **Expert in nonprofit start up:** Lawyer, insurance agent, former nonprofit executive, accountant

Who meets this description:

☐ **Program participant and community member**

Who meets this description:

☐ **Staff member or manager of another social service agency**

Who meets this description:

☐ **Business or community leader**

Who meets this description:

Personal Characteristics

☐ **Is a visionary:** Possesses the ability to inspire others, raise morale, and sell the new organization to grantmakers and other potential funders

Who meets this description:

☐ **Is primarily concerned with family and community interests**

Who meets this description:

☐ **Is patient**

Who meets this description:

☐ **Is supportive**

Who meets this description:

☐ **Is persevering**

Who meets this description:

What other characteristics or areas of expertise are important in understanding your center in particular (youth, experts in health and wellness, etc.)?

☐ Other

Who meets this description:

☐ Other

Who meets this description:

☐ Other

Who meets this description:

Board Member Job Description

Position Title: Chair

Function:

The chair assures that the board of trustees fulfills its responsibilities related to the governance of the institution; is a partner to the CEO, helping him or her achieve the mission of the institution; and optimizes the relationship between the board and management.

Responsibilities:

- Chair meetings of the board
- See that the board functions effectively, interacts with management optimally, and fulfills all of its duties
- Develop agendas with the CEO
- With the CEO, recommend composition of the board committees
- Recommend committee chairpersons with an eye to future succession
- Assist the CEO in recruiting board and other talent for volunteer assignments
- Convey any concerns management has in regard to the role of the board of trustees or individual trustees
- Convey to the CEO the concerns of the board of trustees and other constituencies
- Present to the board an evaluation of the pace, direction, and organizational strength of the institution
- Prepare a review of the CEO and recommend salary for consideration by the appropriate committee
- Annually focus the board's attention on matters of institutional governance that relate to its own structure, role, and relationship to management
- Ensure that the board has fulfilled all of its responsibilities to its own satisfaction
- Act as an additional set of eyes and ears beyond that of the CEO
- Serve as an alternate spokesperson for the CEO
- Fulfill such other assignments as the chair and CEO agree are appropriate and desirable for the chair to perform

Adapted from Dayton 1998

Board Member Job Description

Position Title: Member, Board of Trustees

Function:

Members of the board of trustees provide governance to the organization, represent it before the community, and accept the ultimate legal authority for it.

Responsibilities:

- Participate in planning
- Approve the institution's philosophy and review management's performance in achieving it
- Annually assess the environment and approve the institution's strategy in relation to it
- Annually review and approve the institution's plans for funding its strategy
- Review and approve the institution's five-year financial goals
- Annually review and approve the institution's budget
- Approve major policies

Organizations

- Elect, monitor, appraise, advise, support, reward, and, when necessary, change top management
- Ensure that management succession is properly being provided
- Ensure that the organizational strength and manpower meet the requirements of the long-range goals
- Approve appropriate compensation and benefit policies and practices
- Propose a slate of directors to members and fill vacancies as needed
- Annually approve the performance review of the CEO and establish his or her compensation based on recommendations of the personnel committee and the board chair
- Determine eligibility for and appoint board committees in response to recommendations of the nominating committee
- Annually review the performance of the board and take steps to improve its performance

Operations

- Review the results achieved by management as compared with the institution's philosophy, its annual and long-range goals, and the performance of similar institutions
- Ensure that the financial structure of the institution is adequate for its current needs and its long-range strategy
- Provide candid and constructive criticism, advice, and comments
- Approve major actions of the institution, such as capital expenditures and major program and service changes

Audit

- Ensure that the board and its committees are adequately and currently informed—through reports and other methods—of the condition of the institution and its operations
- Ensure that published reports properly reflect the operating results and financial condition of the institution
- Ensure that management has established appropriate policies to define and identify conflicts of interest throughout the institution and is diligently administering and enforcing those policies
- Appoint independent auditors subject to approval by members
- Review compliance with relevant material laws affecting the institution

Adapted from Dayton 1998

Resources

Publications

Busting Bureaucracy: How to Conquer Your Organization's Worst Enemy
By K. Jonston. 1995. Homewood, Ill.: Business One Irwin.

The Complete Guide to Nonprofit Corporations: Step-by-Step Guidelines, Procedures and Forms to Maintain a Nonprofit Corporation
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By J. M. Hummel. 1996. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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Internet Nonprofit Center
www.nonprofits.org/

The Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations
www.uwex.edu/li/

Nonprofit Issues
www.nonprofitissues.com/

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Appendix

Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement

Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement

By Virginia L. Mason, Executive Director, and Bernice Weissbourd, Founder and Board President, Family Support America

> *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*
>
> —Margaret Mead

Family support has made tremendous advances over the past 25 years. More than 20 states fund state-wide programs; Kentucky alone funds more than 600 Family Resource and Youth Service Centers. Local foundations and city governments are coming together to support city-wide programs in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, and countless other locations. At the federal level, family support has been written into legislation such as the Community-based Family Resource and Support Programs, Empowerment Zones, and Early Head-start.

It is our hope that these developments reflect a growing recognition that promoting the healthy development of children and families is a priority and that as a nation, it is imperative that we consider what is good and bad for them. We look forward to a future in which family support centers are acknowledged as key elements of what makes a community thrive and are universally available. We are committed to creating the type of quality program described in these volumes. In order to reach this goal, individuals, organizations, and government entities everywhere must:

- continue to define and develop our understanding of quality practice in the family support field
- strengthen the communities in which we work
- build a public understanding of the importance of family support and use that understanding to shape national policy for children and families
- move from parent partnerships to parent leadership

The time for family support as a field and as a movement is now. It is time to strengthen the coalition, to unify around common language and structures, and to recognize the power and value of thousands of organizations and programs and millions of families coming together as Family Support America.

Quality Practice in the Family Support Field

One of the lessons that we have learned over the past 25 years is that the family support field knows what works for children and families. In 1996, Family Support America published *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*. This book brought together the best knowledge from more than 2,500 practitioners and parents around the country regarding what it means to practice family support. The resulting principles of family support practice shaped *Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit* as they have shaped everything that Family Support America does. As more and more people and programs become a part of the family support movement, attracted by growing global interest in and increased funding for family support, it is important that we continue to remain faithful to these principles and to what we

know about quality practice. We also must push these principles forward and continually develop our understanding of what they mean for practice in a field that is continually evolving in the face of the changing realities of children and families in our nation. We see a future in which the principles of family support are explicitly woven into the work of every program, agency, and other setting intended to serve children and families across the country. To reach that future, the family support field must:

- operationalize the principles of family support practice, looking at how they apply to all areas of family support practice and to other fields.
- identify outcomes and indicators that are associated with what family support programs do: build the skills and capacities of families and their members. This involves moving away from evaluation models that focus on our ability to prevent low-incidence negative outcomes (child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, etc.) and instead identifying outcomes that are associated with promotion and our ability to achieve what we hope and dream for our children.
- come together to define a learning agenda for the field and identify how we can each contribute to making that learning agenda come alive. What are the areas in which we need further research? How can we more intentionally learn from each other? How can we learn from the commonalties and differences from program to program?
- build our understanding of the needs and strengths of families across the life span—not just those of families that include young children.
- strengthen both pre-service and in-service training and other learning opportunities for those in the family support field.

You can be part of this future by:

- using the principles as a template to shape your planning processes and work
- educating your staff, participants, and community partners about the principles of family support practice
- sharing examples of how you have brought these principles to life in your program
- hosting on-going dialogues about quality family support practice with program staff and parents
- engaging in evaluation activities to monitor the quality and effectiveness of your program on a regular basis; these activities help make the case for continued investment in your program and those like it and help you learn about what the program is doing well and in what ways it needs to change
- providing information on your program

Family Support America is initiating a nationwide project of disseminating and collecting surveys of family support centers. Please contact our headquarters to obtain a survey. The information from these surveys is being used to build a program database that can speak authoritatively about where family support is taking place across the country and about the characteristics of family support programs. The database will connect parents to family support programs in their communities, connect practitioners with each other, and help policymakers to understand the scope and reach of the family support field.

Strengthen Our Communities

Recently, much attention has been paid to the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." In the field of family support, this adage represents a truth that we have known and acted on for many years. We know that just as the healthy development of children is inextricably tied to the health and strength of the families in which they live, the strength and stability of the family is influenced by the community in which its members live. Family support programs work in partnership with a host of community institutions to promote economic well-being, community life, and the overall health of the communities in which they are located. Model programs are engaged in community-building efforts that help to transform communities into not only good places to raise children, but supportive environments for all residents.

While programs have been engaged in community-building work at the local level for a long time, family support, in general, has operated in a sphere separate from that of traditional community development programs.

As a field, we need to:

- build stronger connections to the community development field
- identify model community-building efforts within the family support field
- ensure that community systems of support that are comprehensive, integrated, and easy to access are a central priority of family support
- continue to develop strategies to reach the most isolated families and to connect them to a web of supports within their communities

Your local program can:

- engage parents in civic life by connecting them with the local PTA, neighborhood block club, family support center, or other community entity
- organize activities that improve the physical environment of the community, such as neighborhood clean-ups, neighborhood gardens, and community arts programs
- identify and address community issues as they arise, whether by organizing a neighborhood watch or community policing effort, addressing violence in the community, or advocating for needed services or support
- build strong collaborative relationships with those in your community who provide the formal and informal services on which families depend
- be an active part of community planning and community-building efforts

Build Public Understanding of Family Support to Shape National Policy

The family support field needs to send the message to legislators and other elected officials, public and private funders, and our nation at large that supporting families is essential to our health, our stability, and our future. Sending that message requires that each of us working in our individual communities be the spokesperson for the importance of the family support movement and take part in the national dialogue on family support issues. Making the case for family support is both a moral imperative for our nation and a sound investment in our future. Finally, we need to send the message that family support belongs in every place in which children and families are present, not only in community-based programs and state agencies and human services systems, but also in schools, libraries, health care settings, workplaces, stores, and businesses.

As a field, we need to:

- create materials that communicate clearly what family support is and why it is important
- use the experiences of our day-to-day family support work to shape a national understanding of how we can best support children and families
- connect to the constellation of movements that care about children and families—the youth development movement, health promotion movement, community development movement, and others are all part of this larger picture
- work to shape our family-serving systems (e.g., health, schools, and social services) so that they are guided by the principles of family support practice and incorporate family support approaches
- create a common family support language and set of symbols—as we grow as a movement, we need to begin to speak with a unified voice and to demonstrate the power of our numbers

Your local program can:

- participate in state-wide and local advocacy coalitions that broaden public support regarding issues that affect children and families
- become a part of your statewide or local family support network
- become a part of Family Support America
- send letters to your congressional representatives about the important work your program is doing and the need for more programs like yours
- serve as a spokesperson for the family support movement in local, state, and national forums
- collaborate with churches, libraries, and other community-based programs to build partnerships that will make family support more widely available to the families in your communities

Move From Parent Partnerships to Parent Leadership

One thing that family support programs have always done well is building partnerships of equality and respect with parents. These partnerships are at the core of family support and of the quality practice described above. We also talk about the important role of programs in developing parent leadership and engaging parents as advocates in their communities and in our society as a whole. Family support recognizes the right and the obligation of parents to engage in leadership. We also know that this is a challenging task. The reality is that most parents have a host of responsibilities on their hands, and adding the tasks involved in being an advocate can be overwhelming. We need to think broadly about parent engagement and build a continuum that begins with involvement and moves toward partnership and leadership, that is responsive to the realities of parents' lives but provides multiple genuine opportunities for parents to be engaged and take leadership at all levels of the family support movement. If we are going to put the issues of children and families on the national agenda, parent leadership is essential, and it cannot be carried out by small group of people who have an abundance of time or skills but must represent a broad spectrum of parents, including those who are currently the least likely to have their voices heard.

As a field, we need to:

- support parent leaders who can help to raise awareness of the importance of issues that affect children and families and participate in decisions about the policies that have impact on their lives
- work with other national organizations to ensure that parents' voices are welcomed and called for at the national, state, and local policy tables at which decisions that affect children and families are made
- raise up the voices of all of the parents in our programs
- find and disseminate information on promising practices and programs in parent engagement

Your local program can:

- give parents leadership roles by creating opportunities for them to shape the direction of your program
- support parents as they take on leadership roles in the community and in other arenas
- provide substantive training for parents on advocacy, policy making, and other issues that will help them to build their leadership skills

Just as the past 25 years have been a period of remarkable growth for family support, so the future is full of promise. It is, perhaps, not dreaming to envision family support centers in every community just as we expect to have libraries, parks, and schools. It is possible to project a time in which the family support center has the characteristics of a community center: that it is a place in which people gather and can make connections; an educational resource from which families learn the best possible way to relate to their children based on an understanding of how children develop; a base at which parents become advocates for family-friendly polices; a forger of connections between parents and whatever they need, whether it's job skills training, ESL classes, or GED preparation; a link in a chain of family support programs in the state, through which parents shape programs and polices that affect their children's lives.

The principles of family support practice could well become the nexus of change for social, health, and education services, and that process is now in its initial stages. The recognition that healthy children, families, and communities are the fundamental building blocks for a strong society calls for a parallel recognition that children, families, and communities need and deserve supports in order to reach their goals. Seeking support is no longer perceived as a sign of weakness, but rather as an indication of the strength to control one's life. No society is built on independence alone. It is only when independent people work together and value their interdependence that good things happen for all.

In developing a family support center, you can become an active player in the family support movement. Together, the family support movement can expand the possibilities of the everyday work that you do and of the community of which you are a part. Our goal is to transform the nation, so that when a public official visits a community, his or her first question is, "How are the children doing?" When that time comes, we will have changed the way America works for families.

As a program developer, you are a vital part of the process. The family support movement, Family Support America, is a coalition and requires active participation of all of its members in their programs, communities, and families. Every voice is important. Every individual makes us stronger. You are an important part of this movement, and all of us at Family Support America look forward to working with you.

For a complete catalog of publications or information on technical assistance and training, contact:

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Family Support Centers

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Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit

Volume 3: The Power of Partnership

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Chapter 13

Family Involvement and Leadership

Family Involvement and Leadership

Family members' involvement and leadership in all aspects of family support center functioning is a key part of the family support philosophy. Two family support principles speak to this value (Family Support America 1996):

Principle 1: *Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.*

Principle 5: *Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.*

Using these principles as a foundation, Family Support America (1997) has defined family involvement as:

> *Any role or activity that enables participating families to have direct and meaningful input into and influence on systems, policies, programs, or practices affecting services or community life for children and families.*

This definition is purposefully broad, allowing for the inclusion of a wide variety of involvement activities. On the relatively more intense end of the continuum, parent leadership is one form of involvement in which parents take a strong role in shaping programs and advocating for children's and families' issues within the community. As parents and other family members become more involved over time, many choose to take on leadership roles. Parent leadership has received considerable attention in the training arena, where parent leadership training is becoming increasingly widespread. By its very nature, such leadership extends beyond the realm of centers to advocacy and leadership activities in the broader community. Family support centers, however, can play instrumental roles in nurturing and supporting leadership activities within the community. This chapter will address issues associated with both family involvement and leadership. (A note on terminology: the phrases "parent involvement" and "family involvement" are used throughout this chapter interchangeably. The term "family" or "parent" is used to mean any participant who has a stake in the program—a single mother or father, a set of parents, a foster or adoptive parent, a grandparent, a sibling, or any other kin or non-kin caretaker.)

To successfully develop family involvement and leadership at the program level, staff and participants must establish relationships in which all parties feel respected and valued. Parents' skills and abilities need to be identified and supported, and their active participation in their child's life and the center should be encouraged. As a center develops over time and increasingly emphasizes family involvement, a shift in attitudes typically takes place—staff transition from seeing themselves primarily as "providers" of services to seeing themselves as partners working with parents.

Family involvement has a variety of benefits for both participants and family support centers. The greatest advantage of working with families in partnership is that it makes the center better and more responsive to participant needs. High-quality family involvement (Family Support America 1997):

- improves the quality of programs and services
- increases the responsiveness of programs and policies
- keeps programs relevant and realistic

- provides fresh perspectives and creative solutions
- increases visibility and respect for the center in the community
- increases cohesiveness and collaboration between centers
- improves the center's ability to accomplish its mission
- helps to develop a constituency that can advocate for the program or center
- contributes to the stability of the community

Family involvement can take a variety of forms—from volunteering at the center, to bringing part of a meal for a pot luck, to forming a parent planning committee, to speaking at community forums. All of these are efforts at building partnership and ownership. To ensure that families can be involved in all levels of operation, family support centers should make numerous and diverse opportunities available to participants. These opportunities should allow participants to take on a variety of roles at different levels of intensity, encouraging them to be involved in the ways they want to be involved.

Opportunities should be made available to the parent who has a small amount of time and who does not want to make a major commitment. Opportunities should also be available to the parent who has been involved with the center for several years and is ready to take on a stronger leadership role. The key is to tailor these opportunities to as many different kinds of parents as possible. This chapter will explore a variety of roles participants can play and will provide some concrete tips on how to generate, improve, and sustain involvement over time.

Who Are We Trying to Involve?

Family support centers and other programs have traditionally had a more difficult time involving fathers and other males in programs and activities. For this reason, centers may want to explicitly reach out to fathers and other males in the community who can act as volunteers or mentors. In addition to providing special programming and outreach to fathers, consider recruiting from the local business community, high schools, and religious organizations. For more suggestions on involving fathers and males, please see the insert at right and refer to chapter 16 on outreach and communications.

Be sure to include a mix of people who represent the cultural, racial, and economic diversity of the center's community. Youth and elders within the community are also excellent resources and provide important perspectives. Finally, be sure that you reach out beyond the list of typical parents who are always involved. In many cases, it is useful to ask currently involved families to help in recruiting new families. This strategy is especially effective when the recruiters are similar to the family members you are trying to involve (e.g., men recruiting other men, grandparents recruiting other elders).

Roles for Families

To maximize the quality of family involvement, family support centers should construct a "menu" of involvement opportunities that allows participants to become involved *in the ways that they want to be involved.* Given the variety of factors that motivate individuals, family involvement activities should include a broad range of opportunities at many levels of involvement. Too often, family involvement activities are planned as if all people were the same. It is important to reach out and take advantage of the diversity that exists within the community and to specifically ask parents how they want to be involved.

While many programs focus on parents as board members or classroom volunteers, family members can be involved in a variety of other ways that may interest them and contribute to the quality of the center.

Several of these roles are listed below (Family Support America 1997):

- task force members
- advisory board members
- co-trainers for pre-service or in-service sessions
- program or policy consultants
- mentors for other families
- grant reviewers
- community assessment participants (see chapter 2)
- reviewers of audiovisual and written materials
- planning group facilitators
- members of hiring committee
- fundraisers
- members of the board of trustees
- members of orientation committee for new staff
- consumer satisfaction survey designers
- members of continuous quality improvement design team (see chapter 6)
- staff and participant recruiters

In seeking to improve family involvement at the program level, it is important to consider the diversity of opportunities available to families. Drawing from the list above, these opportunities can be organized using the following categories:

- parents as service providers (both as volunteers and as paid staff)
- parents as mentors for other parents
- parents as board members/decision makers
- parents as resources for center monitoring and improvement
- parents as advocates/leaders

Parents as Service Providers

Community residents and family members served by your family support center may be excellent resources for service provision. Center participants can be volunteers, paid program staff, or special event staff.

While paid parent staff members are more likely to engage in complex and detailed work than are most volunteers, the following lists present examples of several possible roles for parents, whether they are paid or serve on a voluntary basis.

Father's Day Every Day

Below are some ideas for involving fathers and other males in your family support activities.

Hold a father's fair with booths where fathers bring their kids and brush up on diaper changing, hair braiding, teaching kids how to skate or ride a bike, etc. Give away coupons or listings of low-cost family activities in the community. Don't forget games and refreshments!

Throw a father-child picnic. Post fliers inviting the whole community. Provide beverages and a few main dishes, and ask families to bring a dish to pass—fathers and kids can prepare the food together. Give out information on the services your program offers and a flier listing resources for dads.

Sponsor Father-of-the-Year awards. Honor fathers who have overcome obstacles in their lives and the lives of their families, or fathers who embody the principles of family support. Get a local business to underwrite the award—with a contribution to your program—and present it at the ceremony.

Hold an event for non-custodial fathers and their kids. A day of games or an evening of pizza and movies can allow non-custodial dads with visitation rights—who may not be used to spending time with their children—to do so in a supportive environment.

Recruit fathers. Go door-to-door with fliers on your center's support and activities for fathers and families. Set up info tables at sporting events. Arrange a "buddy" system so fathers in your program can recruit their peers. Give a prize for the most recruits.

Offer a dads' support group. Many fathers—particularly teen father—feel isolated and unsure about their skills as parents and providers. Offer support groups and link fathers with employment training and job placement.

(continued on next page)

Direct Service Support

- serve as home visitors or parent group leaders
- provide resource and referral to families
- serve as childcare assistants
- provide respite care
- serve as educators, group facilitators, or peer mentors
- prepare food for a meeting or party
- plan special events and organize field trips
- provide transportation for participants

Fundraising Support

- appear on television or speak on radio talk shows
- write press releases
- develop a promotional slide show
- speak to community service clubs and agencies about the volunteer program
- design brochures and other types of fundraising literature
- provide coordinating links with other agencies, schools, and community groups

Administrative Support

- act as bookkeepers, treasurers, or librarians
- plan and help implement special events for community members
- assess community needs
- do legislative lobbying
- write parent handouts and articles for newsletters
- put up posters, deliver brochures, decorate the center
- recruit new volunteers and notify participants of upcoming events
- type, photocopy, fax, collate, etc.

Father's Day Every Day
(continued)

Support non-custodial fathers and their families. Provide counseling, referrals, and tip sheets to help fathers provide nurturing support for their children—covering issues such as paternity establishment, child support, and visitation rights. (*A Q&A for Unmarried Fathers*, published by the Center for Fathers, Families, and Public Policy, is available from Family Support America at 312/338-0900.)

Make men visible. Recruit men as staff members or volunteers. Dads are more likely to participate in your center when they see other male figures involved. Ensure that your literature includes fathers.

Involve fathers in program decisions. Make sure fathers are represented on your parent advisory group. Build on their strengths, such as community organizing experience or knowledge about child development, to promote them as resources to the program and the community.

Create a mentoring program. Train participants in your program to provide one-on-one support to new fathers and fathers seeking to strengthen relationships with their children. Continuing activities such as mentor training help dads remain involved in your program.

Family Support America *Connection*
(May/June 1999)

Parents as Volunteers

Social service agencies of all varieties have a long history of using volunteers, and with the current trend toward budget cuts and the ever-present struggle of making ends meet, using volunteers is becoming less of an option and more of a necessity. Nevertheless, successful use of volunteer resources requires good planning. Overall, the most important thing to remember is that adding volunteers to your family support center should not be a whimsical process but rather an intentional process that has been carefully considered.

Benefits of Parent Volunteers

The benefits of working with parent volunteers are many:

- Parent volunteers can often relate to the experiences of center participants. Volunteers may come from similar backgrounds and may have faced similar struggles.
- Volunteers are cost effective, because they do not receive wages.
- Volunteers from the local community can expand your service outreach to new populations. Families that may have been hesitant to ask for help from a professional might feel more comfortable with volunteers.
- Parent volunteers bring new skills and new ideas for how to effectively work with families.
- Volunteers who can relate well to their clients have the potential to be strong advocates of parents' rights and center programs.
- Utilizing volunteers from the local community gets people invested in neighborhood issues. These volunteers share in the responsibility of the success of the program and are able to offer suggestions and implement change.
- Volunteers exude a level of enthusiasm and personal commitment that is contagious. This positive effect can spread to families and paid staff and can serve to promote the overall image of the center.

Challenges of Parent Volunteers

While there are many benefits to working with parents as volunteers, there are challenges as well:

- Volunteers with similar ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds to those being served may be more judgmental or demanding of families. They also may become overly involved and have trouble differentiating themselves from the participants.
- Volunteers require extensive training and supervision, both of which are time-consuming and costly.
- Sometimes tension arises between volunteers and paid staff. Paid staff may not enjoy their role as supervisors, and they may not be willing to give up tasks they enjoy to volunteers.
- Volunteers add to the size of a center's staff. A larger staff can make issues such as confidentiality more difficult to maintain, and a larger staff requires more careful management.
- Volunteer programs are prone to high turnover rates. This is not only expensive for the center, but it can also disrupt services and programs for families.
- Some families just don't want to talk to volunteers. They feel that in order to receive the assistance they are seeking, they need to work with a "professional." (Lauffer, Armand, and Gorodezky 1974; Hochberg 1995)

Stipends and Educational Incentives

Reimbursement of parent time is an extremely pressing issue. When it comes to recognizing and rewarding parent volunteers, most centers agree that special dinners, thank you notes, pictures in the paper, and the like are appropriate forms of recognition. However, some centers feel that the time has come to consider financial incentives to improve recruitment and retention of volunteers. There are many forms of financial and educational incentives you may want to consider.

Educational incentives are one way to "compensate" your volunteers. In some situations, a volunteer is given a tuition voucher after completing a specified period of service. Another option is to give course credit for specific volunteer work. A non-monetary educational incentive is to simply allow volunteers to attend the same training sessions offered to the paid staff. Volunteers may also be encouraged and rewarded for attending pertinent training courses outside the center. Strategies for recognizing and rewarding volunteers can be as diverse and creative as the centers that use them.

Parents as Paid Staff

The number of family support centers employing family members as paid staff has increased over the last two decades. So, too, have the responsibilities assumed by families in these roles. Parent consultant positions initially evolved from an appreciation of the unique role that families play in providing support to each other. Families who live in the community and work at the center can promote center activities because they can identify with potential participants (especially those who have been participants themselves) and can effectively communicate the value of the center.

Benefits and Challenges

The benefits of utilizing parents as volunteers discussed above are also applicable when parents are hired as paid staff. In addition, hiring parents as paid staff has the obvious advantage of sending a very concrete message to program participants and other staff that the parent perspective is valued. In addition, when parents make the transition into paid positions, they are often going through a process of professional development that allows them to learn new skills and become more qualified for employment in a variety of settings.

On the other hand, there are challenges associated with hiring parents as staff, many of which are discussed above (such as job clarity, training, orientations, and confidentiality issues). In addition, paying parents as staff may raise issues for other staff, volunteers, and participants. For example, staff may feel that "parent" staff members are hired without considering their qualifications. Volunteers may feel that it is unfair to pay parent staff members for tasks similar to the ones they are performing for free. In addition, other center participants may feel that they are just as well qualified to fill the position. When considering hiring from your participant population, be wary of these issues, and clearly articulate your position.

Logistical Issues Related to Engaging Parents as Staff

In this section we raise specific issues that should be considered when involving family support center participants in staff positions—both as paid staff and volunteers. This is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion of staffing issues. Chapter 8 provides a more in-depth look at staffing issues, including the issues covered here: training, confidentiality, and supervision.

Training

Generally, when centers ask parents to serve in paid or unpaid positions, one thing that they are trying to build off of is the parent's own experience with the center or the parent's own life experience. Thus, for example, centers that hire participants who have graduated from the center to serve as home visitors often do so because their life experience is likely to be very similar to those they will be working with. It is important, however, that your center provide parents who will be working directly with other participants with strong training in order to ensure that they:

- can clearly articulate the relevance of their own experience to others
- understand that their own experience is also always unique
- understand how their experiences are grounded in the larger context of the center, its goals, and its objectives
- understand general principles of relationship building, confidentiality, boundary setting, and other issues related to moving from one side of the worker-family relationship to the other
- can expand on their own experiences

It is important to remember that, while these parents already have a wealth of experience with the one-on-one relationships that are at the heart of family support centers, their experience is that of participant. Helping them make the transition to the other side of the relationship will require the development of specific skills.

For participants who will not be doing direct service support, training will still be important. Part of the goal of this training is to ensure that they can do their jobs in a quality manner. It also helps them to develop a concrete set of skills that they can translate into other job opportunities.

Parent training is a major undertaking for any institution that makes use of parents as volunteers or paid staff members. An effective training program ensures that everybody understands their duties and will perform them to center standards. Training also gives people increased confidence in performing their duties.

In addition to training that is specific to an area of work, it is also important to consider training that will help parents feel as though they are an important part of the larger organization. Specific topics to cover include (Lauffer, Armand, and Gorodezky 1974, 50):

- the center—its mandate, philosophy, history, and organizational structure
- the center's overall program and the program or programs to which they will relate
- the center's client populations, special characteristics, and the needs or problems that typically bring them to seek services
- the types of interaction and boundary setting necessary between volunteers and families
- the services staff provide to families and the administrative services that keep the center going
- the kinds of interactions that exist between the center and other providers of services in the community
- the way decisions are made about programs and policies

Confidentiality

Another topic in which all volunteers and parent staff should be trained, regardless of their specific duties, is confidentiality. In a family support center, all parents taking on a formal role need to be aware that some of the information they learn from families is not meant to be shared. Although the concept of confidentiality may seem like common sense, if a person has not worked in a social service environment before, they may not understand its necessity. Explain to parents why confidentiality is important and what it means to keep something confidential. (For example, telling your best friend about a family you are working with is not keeping confidentiality, even if that friend is not associated with the center.) Parents also need to be aware of the types of information that cannot be kept confidential, such as child abuse. If parents are going to perform home visits or meet with families one-on-one, you might have them practice their "opening line." For example, have them say, "I want you to know that everything you tell me is confidential, which means it will stay just between us. The only thing I can't keep confidential is information about child abuse. By law, I have to report child abuse. Do you have any questions?"

Supervision

Much of the work on paraprofessional programs focuses on the importance of strong supervision. The importance of effective supervision holds true for family support centers that are striving to engage parents—whether in direct service or in other roles and in both volunteer and paid positions. Supervision helps to ensure that individuals who may not have a full-time commitment to the center (like many volunteers and paraprofessionals) still have a contact point who helps them feel connected to the overall work. It also helps to ensure that parents have access to a mentor and an advisor who can help compensate for a lack of formal training.

When crafting a supervisory system, keep in mind the following four central goals:

- **Support:** Perhaps the most important goal of supervision is to make sure volunteers and parent staff members feel supported in their various activities and duties. Just the simple act of sitting down and talking to someone about how his or her job is going helps relieve stress.

- **Feedback:** Sitting down with volunteers and parent staff members and asking them questions about their experiences will undoubtedly lead to feedback about the center's strengths and weaknesses. This information is crucial to improving the center's programs.

- **Quality:** Supervision is a proactive way to ensure the effectiveness of your volunteer program. It allows you to maintain regular contact with volunteers and parent staff members so that if and when situations arise, they can be dealt with promptly and to everyone's satisfaction.

- **Fit:** Is there a match between the job duties and the individual's interests, skills, and personal goals?

Parents as Mentors for Other Parents

One of the most important ways in which parents enjoy being involved with family support centers is through interaction with other parents. Many centers facilitate the creation of "peer support groups," family get-togethers, or other opportunities for families to share with each other. These opportunities can be very informal social situations, or they can involve formal mentoring where a more experienced parent shares his or her experience with another parent. Both experiences allow center participants to build their connections with other parents and the community. Families seeking support are able to find it, and can do so in friendly surroundings. Parents who have experiences and knowledge to share can enjoy the fact that others are learning from their journey. Peer supports also allow the program to shift from the "professionals-as-experts" approach that is often problematic for participating families.
The quality of parent participation can and should be enhanced through in-service training, orientations, and mentoring relationships with experienced parents. "Veteran" parents are a great resource for guidance and training for families newly serving in staff roles. These parents will have a familiarity with the issues new staff may be going through, and they may be easier to approach than professional staff from outside the community.

Parents can also act as mentors to other non-staff parents who are dealing with difficult issue—such as learning to cope with the special needs or disability of a new child, negotiating the teenage years, or adopting a child. (For more information on setting up successful mentoring programs, see chapter 5.)

Parents as Board Members/Decision Makers

Family involvement in the governance role is often seen as the classic form of family involvement. Most families usually do not start out in this role, but graduate to it once they have become comfortable in other roles. For families involved in the governance role, the time commitment is significant, making it difficult for some family members to be involved. Motivations for becoming involved at this level usually revolve around a concern for their children and, subsequently, center programming (Nelson 1999). Other board members, who may see the board's responsibilities as being purely fiduciary in nature, need to be flexible in understanding these members' interests and backgrounds. Over time, new board members will differentiate their interests as their knowledge grows.

Some family members (as well as other new members of a board) may not have a background or training in board operations, and should receive training and an orientation to the process that advises them of time commitments, legal responsibilities, and general board processes. Frequently, more experienced board members can serve as mentors for new members, allowing them to feel more comfortable in the process.

Tips For Involving Parents in Decision Making

- Develop a **plan** for identifying families to participate.
- **Support staff** in developing an understanding the value of family participation.
- Provide **orientations** to both family members and staff about the issues, participants, and process.
- Provide **convenient meeting times and locations** for family members.
- **Compensate** families for their time, expertise, and expenses.
- Clearly identify a staff person as the **primary contact** person for reimbursement and other issues. Be sure she/he understands that timely reimbursement is essential.
- Provide accurate, timely, clear, jargon-free, and appropriate **information** prior to meetings.
- Provide all materials in the families' **preferred languages.**
- Provide **clear information** about the goals of the board, task force, or committee and the roles of individual members.
- **Match veteran parents with inexperienced family members** to ensure that new members feel supported in their roles as advisors and have the opportunity to share their new and fresh ideas.
- **Balance** membership on committees between families and professionals. One family member on a committee is not enough.
- Ensure **diversity** among the membership by recruiting broadly from the community and the population the center serves.
- During and after meetings, specifically **recognize the value** of family participation.
- Consider incorporating a **"family leave" policy** so family members can choose an active role but maintain their membership should family circumstances require some time off.
- Consider **shared leadership**—parent and professional co-chairs.
- Recognize that some family members may require more **support** than others to participate in a meaningful way.

How Our Center Does It

The Carol Robertson Center for Learning

Chicago, Illinois

The center was founded in 1976 by parents and community residents who rallied to save their newly established school age program when its parent agency, the St. Mary Center for Learning, closed due to financial difficulties. These visionary neighborhood parents created a governance structure that assured that parents were the dominant voice in agency management and decision making.

Strong parent involvement, formally organized into the center's management structure at its inception, is the foundation upon which the Carole Robertson Center for Learning developed into a comprehensive, multi-service family support center. Its bylaws require that the center be governed by a constituent-controlled (as opposed to advisory) board of directors elected directly by its membership. The center's corporate membership consists of all parents who have children and youth enrolled in the center's programs. As such, every parent has a voice in governance and is encouraged to participate in determining the direction of the center. While the bylaws require 51% constituent control, in practice this mandate is frequently exceeded. Currently, 73% of the board is comprised of parents. Three of four officer positions, including that of president, are also parents.

In addition to the board of directors, many smaller "user-friendly" leadership structures exist in all agency programs. These include:

- The center-wide Program Advisory Committee (PAC), which consists of elected parent representatives from all child development programs (Early Childhood, Head Start and School Age) at both sites, along with youth program representatives.
- The PAC has direct access to the board via the Program Policy Committee., which exists in all direct service programs at both sites, in addition to a center-wide Head Start Policy Committee and Youth Leadership Council.
- Finally, ad hoc committees and task forces are often formed to act in an advisory role to the board, and membership on board Committees is open to any parent.

These processes have proven an efficient and effective structure for involving parents in meaningful policy participation in center governance. The result of these efforts is a thriving neighborhood-based family support center, which has been built from the community up, rather from the top down.

Parents as Resources for Center Monitoring and Improvement

Family members can be key partners in the process of monitoring ongoing family support center activities and providing feedback for center improvement. Participants can help the center improve its quality in a variety of ways.

Staff Training

Families can help determine training needs of providers by participating in focus groups, surveys, interviews, or brainstorming. Families should be invited to participate in the development of training design. They can brainstorm activities, produce media and materials, and review and comment on drafts of curricula and materials.

When training sessions are offered, families should be invited to attend. Families and providers can better understand each other's roles when they spend time together in learning activities. Families can help to evaluate training programs by attending pilot sessions, reviewing materials, and conducting pre- and post-training surveys.

Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement

As an extension of center planning, parents should also be involved in the evaluation and continuous quality improvement of programs. Parents should be involved from the get-go with setting program goals and objectives, and then later with determining how those outcomes and quality levels will be met. Parents can:

- review any instruments to be used in measuring outcomes and participant satisfaction
- help determine what instruments are most appropriate
- administer different instruments with other program participants
- participate in focus groups or complete surveys
- help analyze and interpret the data
- determine what adjustments need to be made to the program to improve outcomes and consumer satisfaction

By using participant input and active involvement in this process, family support centers are more likely to produce an evaluation that can and will be used to improve programming. Because parents will have ownership over and knowledge of the results, they are more likely to be a priority for action, rather than a report that is shelved. If one is concerned with objectively measuring results, however, there may be some disincentive if participants enjoy a program that does not produce the intended outcomes. One must carefully weigh these factors when considering an evaluation design. (For more information, see chapter 6 on evaluation.)

As with other possible roles for parents, adequate supports and investments must be made to facilitate involvement. Training, supervision, and mentorship should all be considerations when preparing and involving parents in evaluation. Other supports needed by all parents for any type of involvement are discussed below.

Parents as Advocates/Leaders

As family members become more involved over time, some may choose to take on leadership or advocacy roles in the center or community. While some of this activity may take place outside of the realm of the center, family support centers can be hubs of leadership and advocacy activity in the community. From a planning perspective, then, it is important to clarify what role the center will play in supporting and facilitating parent leadership and advocacy.

How do family members acquire leadership skills?

Many family support centers have a fairly strong orientation towards training and education, relying on these methods to foster learning opportunities for parents. Other centers emphasize that people "learn by doing." In the latter case, many parents become more skilled simply by becoming involved, learning from other parents, and meeting challenges as they arise. It is clear that both training and action have critical roles to play in supporting the ongoing growth

Skill Area	**1) Do you feel that you already have skills in this area?**	**2) I would like to receive . . .** (Please mark only one)		
		No Training	**Basic Training**	**Advanced Training**
A. Communication Skills / Public Speaking	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
B. Understanding State and Local Government	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
C. Using Community Resources	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
D. Chairing/Leading a Meeting	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
E. Creating Support Groups	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
F. Understanding People from Different Backgrounds	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
G. Public Relations and the Media	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
H. Organizing Groups and Working with Others to Get Things Done	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
I. How to Determine if Programs Work	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
J. How to Solve Problems	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
K. Understanding Community Needs, Decisions, and Planning	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
L. How to Get My Family's Needs Met	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
M. Training Other Parents	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
N. Understanding State and Federal Laws	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
O. Understanding Budgets and Finances	Yes __ No __	__	__	__
P. Other Skill You Would Like to Have: ____________	Yes __ No __	__	__	__

of parents as leaders and advocates. In the best training approaches, training and concrete action complement each other, allowing parent leaders to apply their lessons to real-life activities. For example, Connecticut's Parent Leadership Training includes formal training and a practicum in which parent leaders take on leadership projects. This approach combines the best of both worlds—opportunities for formal instruction and opportunities for concrete activities that are motivating to parents.

Family support centers that provide parent leadership training must be developed out of parents' *desire* to learn the skills necessary to function in governance, planning, and policy roles. It is most effective when it not a curriculum imposed on parents but a partnership in which professionals meet the expressed needs of parents by providing the knowledge they seek as they assume responsibilities in new and different arenas.

The table on page 12 contains a list of possible leadership skills and asks parents to identify which skills they already have and which skills they would like to address through training. It is important to acknowledge parents' existing skills and to identify which kinds of training they are most interested in. Family support centers can also be instrumental in providing family members with opportunities to experience advocacy and leadership activities within the center. Building on these experiences, many parents choose to become more involved in child, family, and community issues on a larger scale.

Once families have the skills and confidence to speak up for what they need and want, family support centers can link families to opportunities to apply those skills in effecting change within the community. This includes encouraging parents to attend neighborhood, school, and other community meetings that allow them to make a difference. Programs may need to advocate with local groups and organizations to encourage parent participation and to ensure that such groups respect and utilize parent input and are not merely filling required parents seats at the table. In addition, information on center planning and governance structures designed to strengthen parents' capacities as leaders should be components of professional development.

By collaborating with other community groups and organizations, family support centers can bring concerned parents together for discussion, helping families connect over common goals. Centers can engage families in discussions about their vision for the community, barriers to achieving that vision, and possible steps to take to pursue that vision.

Family support centers can also encourage families to pay attention to and participate in city, state, and national politics by emphasizing the links between government policies and their lives. When federal or state legislation is proposed, staff can ask families how they think the law, if passed, could affect them and their community, and what ideas families have for informing policymakers of those consequences. Through such conversations, staff can communicate to families that they have a right to influence decisions that affect them, and that they have a responsibility to speak up when they know a policy will affect them adversely. Centers can encourage parents to become involved with organizations working on policy issues that affect children, families, and communities by providing phone numbers and addresses of legislators and other advocates, or by offering space and materials for families who want to convene meetings about issues affecting their community. Centers could organize group outings to attend city council or state legislative sessions to introduce family members to policymaking sessions, and they should invite political leaders to the center to talk with families, encouraging parents in advance to think of questions and issues they want to address.

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All of these activities can help to create an environment in which a critical mass of parents and community members feel that their opinions matter and that they can affect the quality of life in their community. As a hub for this kind of activity, the family support center becomes the focal point for efforts to improve community conditions and to ensure that a variety of voices are heard and respected.

Key Practices

The following is a list of key practices to incorporate into any parent engagement effort:

- **Involve families who represent a wide range of experience.** Include those who are new to the center, as well as "veteran" parents. Strive to include families who represent a diversity of viewpoints, as well as a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

- **Make the process accessible.** By and large, parents work during the day. If all of your engagement opportunities are during business hours you may effectively eliminate a whole set of families from getting involved. Identifying convenient times and places is essential.

- **Compensate families for participating.** There are a number of ways to compensate parents for their time, energy, and participation. Stipends or other monetary payment is clearly one of them, but there are also gift certificates, tuition waivers, thank you presents, awards, groceries, or other items. The point is to send the message to families that you value their contribution.

- **Reduce the burdens of participation.** Families that are engaged in your program should not have to bear the costs of that engagement. You should consider reimbursement for childcare, travel, and other expenses related to a family's participation. Alternatively, you can consider offering supports so that families will not incur these costs—setting up a carpool for parent board members, or providing childcare onsite during meetings, for example.

Developmental Stages in Family Participation

Finding families who potentially could work with or for the center is the first stage in the process of getting families involved. This phase, called **"engagement,"** should utilize seasoned parent representatives as outreach workers and in "one-on-one trust-building activities with other parents" (Foster 1999, 23). Such representatives can share their experiences with new parents at the center. In this stage, potential parent representatives weigh the costs and benefits of being involved. Actually securing and maintaining families' involvement and leadership requires establishing trusting relationships between participants and their future co-workers, a good reason to have experienced parent representatives available.

The second phase is called **"involvement."** During this period, the organization provides orientation and training for parents. Expectations and commitments are clearly outlined and information is provided in an open and friendly manner. The organization embraces the fact that support and education are universal needs for all parents, recognizes that all parents have strengths, and develops training to build on these strengths. Conflicts are viewed as part of growth and the development of understanding. Through this phase, parents develop recognition of the benefits of participation in the center. Parents have access to new information and learn new skills in decision-making and conflict resolution. Parents can trust that the education and information exchange is truthful and accurate. The depth of knowledge and skills parents gain during this phase will largely depend on the particular role and level of involvement the parent is assuming.

(continued on next page)

(Developmental Stages, cont.)

During the third phase, "**empowerment**," the organization values the role of parents by involving them in evaluation and assessment as well as other key decisions made about the organization. Parents' input is sought not merely as a rubber stamp of the organization's views, but to gain another perspective on the center's performance (how much that opinion is weighted depends on the individual's role and involvement level). This is the stage in which parents start doing the work they had set out to do in the center. Parents recognize personal power to create change within themselves, those around them, and the program in which they are involved. These activities allow parents to add to their own bank of personal skills.

Adapted from Foster 1999

- **Offer supports.** Offer to help families acquire skills or get supports they would need to play their role effectively. For parents taking on direct service roles this may be staffing or supervision. For parents helping out with a community outreach campaign it may be access to the copy machine and computers to develop fliers. For parents on boards it may be board training. Whatever the specific roles parents will be playing in your center, it is important to provide them with the tools that will enable them to succeed.

Levels of Involvement

To involve families most effectively, family support centers need to recognize that families have different amounts of time, interests, and skills. Therefore, centers need to "meet parents where they are" by offering different levels of involvement for different families. Over time, family members may choose to become involved in more intense ways. Many participants are more comfortable getting involved in small ways at the outset and becoming more involved as they become more familiar with the center.

Removing Barriers to and Providing Support for Involvement

Having roles available for family members and parents is just the first step to involving participants in center operation and governance. Barriers to involvement must be removed, and other supports must be in place to free families' time to be involved. Below is a table outlining some of these needs for support.

Common Barriers to Family Involvement	Possible Solutions
Attitudes	**Attitudes**
• Staff don't feel comfortable talking about issues in front of families. • Families don't trust the staff. • Staff members think families are too overwhelmed to participate. • Staff aren't willing to accept families as equals. • Providers are paternalistic. • Families think they have nothing to contribute. • Staff members worry that families will violate confidentiality.	• Hold meetings away from the center where all parties are comfortable. • Dress informally so suits, ties, and high heels do not separate professionals from "just parents." • Take time for staff and parents to get to know one another. Tell stories and share information that breaks the ice and helps people develop real connections to one another. • Provide training to help develop listening skills and appreciation of different perspectives.

Common Barriers to Family Involvement	Possible Solutions
Logistics	**Logistics**
• Centers have not budgeted for childcare. • Transportation is unavailable for families to get to meetings. • Meetings are held only during regular work hours. • Families are not reimbursed for the time they take off work to attend meetings.	• Provide childcare or reimbursement for childcare. • Provide transportation or transportation stipends. • Plan meetings at times when the maximum number of people can attend (use flex-time for staff). • If families need to take time off from work, reimburse for lost wages.
System Barriers	**System Barriers**
• No system is in place for paying participants. • Staff time can only be paid during regular working hours. • There is a lack of resources available to support family involvement.	• Reward families for their participation, through reimbursement, recognition, training opportunities, etc. • Offer staff in-kind reimbursements for participation or compensatory time.
Lack of Skills	**Lack of Skills**
• Families have never participated in these types of activities. • Families are unaware of procedure. • Providers aren't ready to work with families in new ways. • Lack of information about roles of families and providers.	• Provide families with time to come together before the larger meeting, where they may gain any needed training and get to know one another. • Train families on meeting procedures. • Clarify with staff how involvement benefits them and the center. • Clearly define the roles of different collaboration members.

In addition to addressing many of these barriers, centers should structure involvement opportunities in such a way that participants find them rewarding and meaningful. Tasks should be structured so that they are attached to some outcome that is important to the participant (don't just ask parents to stuff envelopes). Also, attempt to link participants with jobs that utilize their skills, so that parents are likely to experience success and not be overwhelmed by the task.

Provide different types of compensation. Just as different parents find different tasks rewarding, they are also motivated by different factors. Consider making both monetary payment and in-kind resources available. Use gatherings and parties to provide families with social and relationship-building opportunities and recognition of their work. To foster neighborhood cohesion and excitement, sponsor rallies.

Provide parents with access to institutions and resources outside the neighborhood through an exchange of "favors." For example, consider providing museum employees access to parenting education or recreational activities in exchange for free admission for the center's parent leaders at the museum. Make education and training available, so that parents can climb a career ladder.

Finally, have food at every meeting and get-together. Food helps people enjoy each other's company and talk as equals, and it provides nourishment and energy for the work to be done (Spriggs 1999, 54-55).

Seeking Feedback on Family Involvement

Involving families in all aspects of managing a family support center is not an easy task. Indeed, it is probably safe to say that no one center can claim full and equal family participation in every aspect of program development, management and governance. Still, in order to be true to the guidelines for family support practice, every center should strive towards that goal. In the words of Family Support America's Executive Director, Virginia Mason, "Ensuring that parents remain actively involved in planning and deciding what is best for their children and families stands as one of the most important principles of family support." And finding ways to check on one's success at involving families is critical. This section will offer some considerations and suggestions on how to seek feedback on a center's family involvement and leadership activities.

Family Involvement— Bumps in the Road

There have been many pressures in recent years for social programs to involve parents and families in program decision making. When programs and agencies seek to involve participants for the wrong reasons, many tensions may arise.

Tokenism: When programs respond to external pressures such as funders or government agencies requiring parent involvement without believing it is important for improving their program, parents can "be at the table" but not actually be taken seriously. Their presence alone is seen as adequate. Other times, programs may have better intentions for involving parents, but do not provide an empowering context where parents can provide input that is meaningful. Again, they are "at the table" but still do not have any real power.

Another issue that can arise is the unintentional (or intentional) overuse or undercompensation of involved families. When families are expected to "do it all" without adequate compensation for tasks performed, participants may feel "used" by the program. For example, if parents are asked to translate a new parenting curriculum purchased by the center (free of charge), while translators are normally compensated at $25 an hour, this can be unfair to parents. Another common mistake is to over-rely on the same parents for everything. While volunteers may be an important resource for programs on tight budgets, programs should be sure to monitor themselves to ensure that families are not giving too much to the program without receiving some rewards in return.

Preliminary Questions

What's the purpose for gathering the feedback?

Presumably, the purpose will be to improve the quality and degree of family involvement and leadership in the center's activities. But it is definitely worthwhile to check this assumption. For example, do parents feel satisfied with their involvement while other staff feel that it should still be changed and improved? Do some parents feel satisfied while others wish for greater involvement? Is there a funding requirement for family involvement that needs to be documented? All of these are legitimate reasons for gathering feedback and can be useful entry points into the process—but they all also bring along different perspectives and goals which, ideally, should be openly recognized from the outset.

Do you want formal or informal feedback?

There is a big difference between hanging out in the laundromat to find out what the word on the street is and designing a systematic and structured information collection process. Both can yield very significant findings and both approaches have their place; in fact, you may want both types of information. Here again, some preliminary thought on the type of feedback you want will help in the planning process.

Do you want quantitative or qualitative information?

Quantitative information refers to numbers and statistical information. Qualitative information refers to stories, narratives, and examples. Often, both types of information are necessary to truly understand the feedback received.

Who are your information gatherers and who are your informants?

Who is available, willing, and prepared to collect the information you are seeking? Do you want people from within the center? Do you want parents already actively involved or parents not involved? Or would you prefer to use people not at all affiliated with the center? This question, of course, cannot be fully addressed without considering available resources (time and money), but you might want to consider who would be ideally suited for this work and then try to match those who are available as closely as possible. Similarly, you need to consider who you want to hear from (professionals, parents, children, youth, elders, other community stakeholders, etc.)

How much time do you want to devote to this process?

Gathering information of this sort can be very time consuming. By knowing your purpose and understanding your available resources, you can set some parameters on the time you are willing to allocate.

How much money is available to support the gathering of feedback?

Clearly, a formal, structured data gathering process conducted by trained outside evaluators cannot be put in place without additional resources. On the other hand, useful information can be gathered using resources already available within the center and the community. It is helpful to clarify this before beginning the process.

How will the information gathered be used?

“Know thy audience” is an important rule of thumb in any evaluative activity. This brings us back to the question of purpose. It is critical to know what you want to do with the information you collect before you consider anything else. Will the information be given to a parent-led group to better understand how to provide more varied opportunities for involvement and leadership? Or will it be given to a skeptical audience that needs to be convinced that parent involvement and leadership are worthwhile goals?

Methods

It is very important that the people who provide the information learn what conclusions have been drawn and what changes, if any, will take place as a result. Once you have a clearer understanding of why you want the information you are collecting and how it is going to be used, you can begin to think about how to gather that information—that is, what methods to use. Here are some options to consider:

Interviews

Interview formats vary: they can be highly structured, semi-structured or open-ended. They can provide the interviewer with the complete text to read or they can give the interviewer some bullet points to cover during the course of the discussion. Also, one interview can include some structured and some open-ended questions.

Focus groups

Focus groups are usually small groups of individuals who meet with a facilitator who has a set of guiding questions. Typically, the questions are open-ended and the purpose is to generate discussion on the topic of choice. Focus groups can be very useful to narrow the types of questions to be used in an interview or self-assessment process. Because of the importance of keeping the flow of conversation free and comfortable, if the discussion is not being recorded, it is helpful to have one person facilitate the discussion and another person take notes.

Self-assessment tools

These are often rating scales used by program staff and participants to find out how they think they are doing. Often self-assessment tools are used in combination with other methods. Self-assessment can be a useful and non-threatening way to set the stage for further reflection and discussion about the perceptions of what is working well and what needs improvement.

One such tool can be found in *Making Room at the Table* (Family Support America 1997), a training curriculum designed to encourage family involvement and leadership, and is shown on the following page.

Family Involvement Self-Assessment Questions

How much do each of the following statements describe the quality and nature of family involvement in your center?

Self-Assessment Statements	Extremely well	Moderately well			Not at all
	5	4	3	2	1
Supporting Involvement					
1. We create opportunities for families to engage in peer networking and support with each other and with staff.					
Training & Education					
2. We offer training sessions for professionals and families, which are co-facilitated by participants and staff, on how to work collaboratively with each other.					
Communicating Clearly					
3. We make sure that the information we share with families is free of jargon and can be easily understood by all of the participants.					
4. Information is provided in all of the languages spoken in our group.					
Support from the Top					
5. The quality of family involvement (e.g., intensity and meaningfulness of involvement) is one of our measures of success for evaluation and monitoring.					
6. Our initiative devotes resources, such as money and staff time, to family involvement.					
Achieving Appropriate Representation & Recruiting Diversity					
7. We recruit and engage families who have not typically been involved in decision-making or other kinds of family involvement.					
8. The center participants who are involved in our effort are representative of the larger community in terms of race, culture, language, income, and education.					
Flexibility & Responsiveness					
9. Our meetings and other opportunities for involvement are offered at times and locations that are convenient for family members.					
10. We have a flexible involvement policy that allows family members to determine the level and intensity of their involvement.					
Going Beyond Meetings					
11. Parents participate in ongoing evaluation and assessment of our center.					
12. Parents participate as paid staff.					
13. We encourage and support parents' involvement in community advocacy and leadership efforts beyond our own activities.					

Self-Assessment Statements	**Extremely well**	**Moderately well**			**Not at all**
	5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
Setting Goals					
14. Family members who are involved have clear roles and expectations.					
Going Beyond Token Involvement					
15. Family members on decision-making bodies have full voting rights.					
Changing Organizational Attitudes					
16. Family members trust the relationship they have with the professionals in our center.					
17. The professionals in our center respect the opinions of family members and work with families to make these recommendations a reality.					

In using any self-assessment tool, staff and families should rate their efforts, provide examples and discuss with different stakeholders how the center is handling the different items listed. The results should then be used to stimulate planning for the improvement of the center's existing activities and to initiate new opportunities.

Participant Observations

A frequently used method in qualitative research studies is participant observations. The person collecting the information participates in the activities that are being reviewed and observes from the participant's point of view. In our context, this might mean someone participating in a parent leadership training session or someone sitting in on a board meeting in the role of a parent to see how welcome his or her input is.

Feedback Box

Something as simple as an easily accessible feedback box where anyone can write down their thoughts and suggestions can sometimes generate useful information. It is important to maintain confidentiality and, at the same time, let people know that the feedback is useful information that is considered carefully.

Unobtrusive Measures

This is a way of using information that is already available. For example, if the focus on parent leadership is democracy education, one could simply count the number of parents who vote in local elections. Other such unobtrusive measures might include counting the number of parents who are members of the board of directors, the number of parents who run for school board, the number of staff that can name more than five active parents in their center, etc.

Note: Getting feedback is an evaluative task and, as such, will overlap with any discussion on evaluation. The questions and methods raised here are by no means exhaustive and are only meant to stimulate discussion. For further discussion, see chapter 6 on program evaluation and the references cited at the end of that chapter.

Resources

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By L. E. Pooley, F. Worotschek, and J. Williams, eds. 1997. Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

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Chapter 14

Collaborating in Your Community and Beyond

Collaborating in Your Community and Beyond

> *"Collaboration" is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals.*
>
> —Mattessich and Monsey 1992, 7

Collaboration creates the potential to achieve outcomes that are greater than those achievable by individuals alone, and working in partnership with others is a key step in doing "whatever it takes" for children and families. Working collaboratively is one of the ways in which family support centers model the principles of family support both to the families they serve and to other programs, funders, evaluators, and others they work with.

Elements of Collaboration

- mutual respect for skills and knowledge
- honest and clear communication
- understanding and empathy
- mutually agreed upon goals
- shared planning and decision making
- open and two-way sharing of information
- accessibility and responsiveness
- joint evaluation of progress
- absence of labeling and blaming

From *Focal Point* 1987.

Here are some of the reasons for centers to collaborate with others:

- No family support center, no matter how big its budget is, will be able to meet all the needs of each family that comes through the door. Collaborating with others is an important way for centers to provide access to comprehensive services, without providing every type of service on site or by center staff. Not every service is appropriate to have on site. Domestic violence shelter services, for example, would be difficult to provide on site without compromising the safety or confidentiality of those families seeking shelter. Centers instead may want to work with a shelter provider to place a family needing shelter.

- Family support centers should not duplicate services already available in the community. They need to work with others in their communities to ensure that available resources are used efficiently to best meet the needs of children and families. This means not duplicating services that others already provide in a family-supportive manner.

- Family support centers are not meant to create family dependency, but rather to help families create and engage with supportive networks within their community. While it is important for centers to be there for families when they need them, it is also important that they don't become the only place to which a family turns. Ideally, centers help connect families to a network of supports in their communities that includes other service providers, informal supports (religious organizations, block clubs, etc), and other families and individuals.

- Centers need to be constantly learning and growing. Collaborative relationships help centers to develop learning partnerships with others both inside and outside of the family support field.

In the end, collaboration is about making sure that the best and most comprehensive services and supports are available to families.

Family support centers should collaborate on multiple levels to accomplish the best quality of services possible. Collaborations can take place at the program/family level, the program/community level, and at a higher, more comprehensive level (network, state, or national). Each of these will be explored below with suggestions for strategies in how to best implement each collaborative effort.

Center and Family Collaboration

Collaboration is about forming partnerships to get work done, and the most important partnerships for family support centers is the relationship between the center staff and the family. But because center and family collaboration is a frontline issue and this chapter is mainly concerned with center administration, we will not discuss it in detail here. We do, however, want to note that effective collaboration at other levels is dependent on strong program and family collaboration. Ideally, families should help drive both whom the center collaborates with and how they collaborate with them. For more information on developing strong collaborative relationships at the center level, see *Learning to Be Partners*, by Lynn Pooley.

Community Collaboration

The essence of community collaboration is working with others to build a system of support for children and families. Community collaboration not only means working in partnership with other family-serving agencies, but also coordinating with formal and informal resources in the community. Family support centers involved in community collaboration see their work as part of an integrated effort to meet broader community goals and priorities. Below are some steps you can take to form a community-based collaborative.

Step 1: Identify Potential Partners

My collaborative's members have...

clout ☒
commitment ☒
diversity ☒
expertise ☒
resources ☒

Before embarking on a collaborative venture, carefully and strategically determine what linkages will be most helpful. Your center should identify the needs of the collaborative to aid in the process of selecting members. For example, you need strong commitment from partners in order to be effective, so it makes sense to include members who are committed to the vision of the collaborative. For this reason, your center may choose to exclude organizations whose mission or principles differ drastically from that of the collaborative. However, do not take decisions to exclude certain organizations or individuals lightly. Some organizations' potential contributions may not be immediately obvious, and collaboratives may find themselves needing to cooperate with an organization that they originally excluded. The best partnerships identify potential adversaries and work from the start to turn them into allies by involving them in the collaborative process.

Family support centers should try to involve all kinds of organizations and people in the community in the collaborative venture, including schools, YMCAs, hospitals, local businesses, and public officials. Groups and organizations can be involved in varying capacities, depending on the purpose of the collaboration. If you are setting up a community referral network, some organizations may provide services directly in the name of the collaboration, while others may simply provide referrals to other organizations. Others may act as consultants or advisors, periodically reviewing the collaborative's progress. Involving many stakeholders may slow down the process, but it will make it more successful in the long run because the community will feel a sense of ownership and loyalty for the collaborative.

Potential Community-Level Collaborative Partners

Frontline workers
Agency directors
Program participants
Community residents
Local leaders (religious, political)
Community-based organizations
Local government and businesses
Park Service
Schools

1. **Begin with the community assessment.** Your center's resource assessment should have identified the informal and formal service providers in the community. Go back and review this information. If it has been several years since you conducted the community assessment, this might be a good time to field new service provider and association surveys. (See chapter 2 for a review of community assessment information.)

2. **Identify program participants and community leaders who are willing to participate in collaborative planning.** To form an effective collaborative, your center must not only bring together service providers and resources but be driven by the voice of community residents. Identifying local leaders, center participants, and residents who truly speak with the voice of the community can help ensure that collaborative relationships will really meet participant and community needs. Ideas for finding such participants and community members are provided in both chapter 2 and chapter 13.

3. **Find other service providers who share a family-supportive philosophy.** One of the dangers of collaboration is linking with partners who do not share the same values and practices as your center. This can make for frustrating working relationships and affect the way families view the center. Talk to the families in the center about the agencies or organizations they work with, belong to, or get services from. Which programs practice the type of respectful partnerships that are embodied in family support?

4. **Identify strategic linkages.** Remember that collaboration takes work and that it is better to have strong relationships with a few organizations than to have paper collaborations with many. It is generally easy to brainstorm long lists of potential partners, but it can be difficult to find the time for effective follow-up. Start by building linkages with a few key organizations—and then expand from those partnerships.

Step 2: Commit to Working Together

Working collaboratively requires time, resources, and compromise. Before embarking on any collaborative effort, you and your partners should appraise your ability to make the necessary commitment. A commitment to working in a collaborative involves

- agreeing to the general principles and goals of the collaborative
- agreeing to do the specific tasks necessary to accomplish the goals
- agreeing to work in a partnership that benefits all participants

In order for organizations to make a realistic assessment of their ability to commit they must understand the collaborative's vision, be aware what is expected of them, and know the rules for working collaboratively. As a group, you and your partners must agree on the reason for your collaborative effort in order to unify members from different organizations, disciplines, and personal histories around a common purpose or ideal.

After establishing a unifying theme, lay out what is expected of the members, including how much time, commitment, and resources will be required from each participant. Create the ground rules for working collaboratively, deciding on the specifics of working together. Only after you understand the goals, rules, and expectations of the collaborative can you and your partners make an informed decision to commit to the effort. Potential members should consider several issues in deciding to participate:

Questions for Members of All Collaboratives
Do we have the time to participate? Do we have the resources?
Is the vision of the collaborative amenable with our own mission?
Do we have a good relationship with the other organizations in the collaborative?
Are we already experiencing a significant amount of stress as an organization?
Would joining help?
Will the benefits to our organization or services outweigh the costs of participating
and making any necessary organizational changes?
Can we realistically meet the collaborative's expectations at this time?
Does the collaborative's perspective on cultural diversity fit with our philosophy?
Are staff members in general supportive of the effort? Are our families supportive?

Additional Questions for Members of Community Collaboratives
Does the vision of the collaboration match my idea of what is best for my family?
Does the vision match my idea of what is best for my community?
Am I willing to invest the time and energy to actively engage the larger community
in the work being done by this collaborative?
Does the collaborative truly value my input and respect the different
background I bring to the table?

Step 3: Develop Concrete ways to work together

There are many ways that you can forge collaborative relationships, and they vary in their degree of formality. It is often easiest to start with an informal relationship and progress into a more formalized one.

1. **Develop a common vision.** The principles of family support can serve as a framework for the shared vision that is necessary for any collaboration to be successful. Shared vision brings the collaborating partners together for a common purpose, providing the ground from which mutual goals and objectives, as well as specific tasks, decisions, and projects, evolve. While developing an overall vision requires thinking about *why* partners want to do something, goals and objectives specify *what* to do and *who* will be served or involved. Identifying specific goals and objectives will help keep the collaboration concrete and ensure that it results in specific outcomes for children and families. For more information on vision, mission, goals and objectives, see chapter 2.

2. **Create mechanisms for on-going communication.** Too often people think of establishing collaboration as a one shot deal or something that can be done through sporadic meetings. For collaboration to be effective, mechanisms for regular and ongoing communication need to be put in place. Before each meeting the partners should establish who will convene or facilitate that meeting as well as a process for setting an agenda for the time spent together. In addition to regular meetings, collaborating agencies should exchange newsletters and excerpts from quarterly or annual reports that give an overview of current activities. Each partner should designate a contact person responsible for maintaining communication and responding to questions.

3. **Share information.** In order for organizations to collaborate effectively they need to know enough about each other to identify points where they can support each other and work together. The following is a list of information that may be important for you and your collaborative partners to share:

    - mission and goals
    - what you actually do, the programs offered, and the requirements for participation
    - the policies and procedures you follow when delivering services
    - your funding sources and rules governing utilization of funds
    - the terms and acronyms used on a regular basis
    - how you define success
    - the organizational structure and lines of decision-making authority
    - internal communication patterns
    - allies, supporters, adversaries
    - what you feel their strengths are
    - current barriers that limit your ability to provide the best service
    - contacts with helpful organizations outside the community
    - the resources you can contribute
    - the role you play within the community
    - your connection to other community organizations

4. **Create tools/mechanisms for working together.** There are specific tools that can facilitate collaboration and help shape joint work. Depending on the nature and goals of your collaboration, the tools listed below may help you do your work more effectively:

    - **Interagency agreements:** Specify the commitment that each partner is making to the collaborative effort. An interagency agreement begins with the vision, mission, and goals of the collaborative, and explains how the collaborative intends to achieve those goals. It lists the specific tasks that each participant is responsible for and documents the time and resources that each participant is expected to commit. All the participants or participating agencies should signal their commitment by signing the agreement.

- **Interagency staff development:** Providing cross-agency training decreases the costs of training and ensures that staff members from the partnering agencies have a common base of knowledge. It also enhances the collaborative effort by encouraging relationships to develop among the staff members of different agencies. Trainings can be conducted by outside sources, or agencies can educate each other in their own areas of expertise.

Contents of Interagency Agreements

- statement of joint mission or philosophy
- definition of the obligations of each agency (e.g., to free up 15 percent of one staff member's time for collaborative activities)
- agreement to utilize common forms developed by the collaborative
- agreement to participate in case staffings
- agreement to participate in cross-agency trainings
- assignment of specific tasks (e.g., to help develop a common consent form)
- agreements about interagency work (e.g., to co-locate one staff member once a week at another agency
- resource sharing agreement

- **Common intake forms:** Common intake or assessment forms ease some of the administrative burdens of coordinating services, as all agencies will recognize and accept the same forms when providing services. This is beneficial in a number of ways. It facilitates cooperation by allowing the simple transfer of information upon request (with family consent). This in turn prevents families needing services from multiple partners from having to fill out many different forms asking for essentially the same information. Finally, it helps ensure that families are considered for all services for which they qualify, regardless of their point of entry into the collaborative.

- **Co-location and staff out-stationing:** You and your partners may choose to co-locate to facilitate physical access to your agencies, both for staff members and for program participants. This can mean one partner moving into another's space or a number of organizations moving into a new shared location. Another way to share space is to share staff. That is, one partner may place a certain number of their staff members at another partner's agency for a given number of days each week.

- **Community support agreements:** You and your partners can formally enlist the help of community members in supporting other families in the community.

- **Common consent forms:** If one of the goals of your collaboration is to share information on families that the center and your partners are serving, it is important to safeguard the confidentiality and comfort of the families in question. A good way to handle questions of confidentiality is to create a common consent form for families to sign when receiving services from any collaborating programs. This will ensure families' rights to privacy, and the process of creating a form will help you and your partners think through the specifics of how you will share information. Ideally, a consent form should be one piece of a larger introductory packet that explains the nature of your partnership, the services offered, and each participating agency's responsibility to the collaborative. Such a packet will enable families to make informed decisions about what information they want shared and which agencies should have access to that information.

Consent Forms

What Do Families Need to Know Before Signing?

- the purpose of sharing information
- which agencies could potentially see their records
- under which circumstances information will be shared
- how information will be shared
- what the agencies will do with the information when they receive it
- how long information can be shared without getting a new authorization from the family
- confidentiality rights

Consent Forms Should Inform Families of their Right to

- limit the sharing of specific information
- limit the sharing of information with specific agencies
- inspect the information being shared
- revoke their authorization to release information in the future

5. **Evaluate shared work.** It is unrealistic to expect that the members of your collaborative will mesh seamlessly or that the work will proceed without difficulty. You and your partners should be prepared to encounter challenges along the way. This means continuously assessing how things are working, both for families served and for the staff members of each agency. Such assessment should be part of the evaluation strategy of any partnership.

Making Trouble-Shooting a Continuous Process

- Make a suggestion box available at each participating agency so that staff members, families, and volunteers can express their frustrations and concerns and suggest solutions.
- Solicit feedback from staff members and families through formal surveys.
- Allow time at agency and collaborative meetings to discuss concerns.
- Set up an executive committee or a barrier-busting team that regularly meets to review progress, address difficulties, and develop solutions.
- Reward staff for developing innovative ways to meet challenges and overcome barriers.

Collaboration Beyond the Local Level

Family support centers also need to establish collaborative relationships with the organizations that fund, monitor, and support family support work. Because family support does business differently than traditional services providers, it is important to ensure that partners—funders, evaluators, professional networks and others—share a vision about how to work for children and families.

Networks

As the family support movement has grown and supporters have recognized the benefits of sharing information, ideas, and experiences, networks of centers are coming together across the country to support and learn from each other. Networks create a forum for interagency communication and professional development and provide opportunities to improve service quality, support workers, and share training costs. Family support networks have also formed in response to changing political and economic realities that put families at risk. Realizing the need for coordinated action at local, state, and regional levels, family support proponents have joined in advocacy and public education efforts.

The first statewide family support network, presently known as the Family Resource Coalition of Florida, was created in 1980 in Florida. As the field of family support and the number of family support centers have grown, so have the number of family support networks around the country. Today, we know of 19 statewide family support networks and dozens of networks at the city and county level. Networks can be small and targeted like the Parent Child Center Network in Vermont, which includes staff from 12 parent child centers, or large and inclusive like the Family Resource Coalition of New York, which connects over 900 individuals. Networks can provide important supports for centers by linking them to others with similar concerns and interests. In general, networks serve three broad functions:

Advocacy/Public Education

Being part of a network brings increased visibility and power to individual members. Working together gives members additional political clout in their advocacy efforts, which may in turn increase their ability to secure funding for family support services. Typical advocacy efforts include lobbying state and local governments to pass prevention-oriented policies, working to infuse family support principles into state agencies, garnering funds for the creation of more family support centers, promoting interagency collaboration, and opposing policies that would be detrimental to families and children.

Many networks also value increasing public awareness about the current conditions of families, what families need to succeed, and the role of family support in families' lives. As the public better understands the need for family support, policymakers will feel more compelled to pass and implement family-friendly policies and fund family support centers. Networks have also sponsored media campaigns and published and distributed books about family support.

Family Day in Connecticut

September 11, 1998, marked Connecticut's first annual Family Day. With addresses by Governor Rowland, Family Support America Executive Director Virginia L. Mason, Senator Crisco, and a panel of parent speakers, the kickoff event drew hundreds of policymakers, family support providers, and other family advocates to the atrium of the state's legislative office building in Hartford. Local programs and family support advocates around the state sponsored events and celebrations all weekend, using the day to draw community and media attention to the importance of families receiving the support they need to raise their children. More than 4,000 planning kits were sent to communities across the state so that they could plan their own activities, and 60 cities requested and received copies of the proclamation to post locally.

Technical Assistance/Training

Practitioner/parent relationships are key to implementing the family support philosophy, but existing training institutes (such as schools of social work) do not always emphasize skills that are important for family support workers. In addition, many family support centers employ paraprofessionals who have had limited training. As a result, providing or sponsoring training is a vital aspect of many family support networks. Often, such training is aimed at building the skills of family support practitioners or providing the tools for other practitioners to begin taking a family support approach. Networks have developed credentialing processes for family support practitioners, hosted conferences, and started training institutes.

Family support networks also provide technical assistance to help member agencies improve service quality and capacity. Technical assistance can be provided through training and conferences, mentoring among agencies, and presentations by individual members. Topics could include evaluation, preparing for welfare reform, working with specific populations, addressing corporal punishment, and/or funding issues. Technical assistance is sometimes offered to help agencies other than family support centers become more family supportive.

Communication and Support

Because of their open-ended, relationship-based structure, networks are ideal forums for sharing information, ideas, and experiences. Family support networks provide members with opportunities to build relationships with others working in the field, discuss issues of common concern face-to-face, and provide emotional and professional support to one another.

Networks differ in the type of information shared and the manner of sharing it. Some networks maintain a clearinghouse of relevant research, training curricula, and other materials. Many produce periodic newsletters to keep members up to date on legislation, conferences, and training in the field, as well as trends in family support practice. Other networks share information through informal meetings and conference calls. Regardless of how information is shared, the objective is for members to learn from one another.

> *"Our members feel that they are part of an organization of like-minded individuals who are facing the same challenges in developing school-based family resource centers.*
> *That support is an important function of the network."*
>
> —Norma Meek, Family Resource Youth Services Coalition of Kentucky
>
> *"Our function is to help people who are getting started so they don't have to reinvent the wheel.*
> *There are too many people who have been through it already who can mentor others."*
>
> —Christie Canard, Oregon Family Resource Coalition

Government

Government agencies at the local, state, and even national level can be important collaborative partners. Beyond acting as funding sources, government agencies can provide the following:

Resources and tools

Because of increased accountability pressures in recent years, government agencies at all levels have invested more in researching what works and what does not. Government agencies often fund initiatives and research that can provide family support centers with cutting-edge information on best practices. One product of this funding is the development of tools and resources designed to help others implement quality programs—often available for free or for a nominal charge. For example, the National Education Goals Panel produces and distributes The Community Action Toolkit for free. This how-to guide features information on how to increase the impact of grass-roots communication techniques and media relation activities, details a step-by-step process to mobilize communities to achieve their goals, and describes how to set up a local reporting process to track progress in education reform.

Technical assistance and support

Government agencies may also support staff development, training, and technical assistance to local family support centers and collaboratives, either directly or indirectly (through contractors). These trainings and technical assistance opportunities not only offer centers a chance to gain professional development for staff members—they also can give centers close contact with state officials, facilitating communication about professional development and family support system needs. Through these trainings, state officials can get a closer look at what is going on at the front line of practice.

One example of such a government-sponsored effort is FRIENDS—the National Technical Assistance Project for Community-Based Family Resource Services (CBFRS)—funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). FRIENDS offers technical assistance to assist states and tribal organizations as they develop family support networks and centers through the federal CBFRS. Community-based centers funded through CBFRS may access technical assistance through the state agency that administers the CBFRS grant. More information is available at www.frca.org/friends.htm.

Networking opportunities

Government agencies often provide local service providers opportunities to network with others around their state or the country. They can refer individuals and organizations to one another when they are seeking information on innovative practices or want to work with peers to address a particular issue. As mentioned above, government agencies can sponsor conferences at which centers can gain information about best practices, new legislation, or regulations. For example, the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), provided a number of teleconferences after Child Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) passed through Congress. Participants discussed implementation issues, including how to enroll eligible children. And in February 1999, HCFA convened "Adherence to HIV Therapies: HIV Treatment and Prevention Issues," a teleconference with a variety of panelists who gave presentations and took questions from viewers. For more information, see www.hcfa.gov.

Public education opportunities

Government agencies can be a valuable partner in spreading the message about family support. Public education campaigns can help family support centers advocate for a more institutionalized system of family support in their locality or state, or they can serve as a marketing mechanism to attract new consumers. Government actors can provide funding for these initiatives or become actively involved in designing campaigns to get the word out about family support or about policies that affect family support practice. Consider contacting appropriate agencies in your state about both of these approaches.

The State of Illinois provides one example of a government's involvement in a public education campaign related to family support. Illinois produced a video entitled "All My Child Care" to educate public aid recipients of the availability of the state's childcare resource and referral network, financial aid available to those who needed childcare, and how to go about searching for childcare. The video was played in waiting rooms of public aid offices and community health centers.

State and National Organizations

National organizations can provide family support centers with resources similar to those available through state governments, including training and technical assistance, networking opportunities, and new resources and research. They also can provide programs with a powerful advocacy voice and more in-depth information on their particular area of expertise. When working with state and national nonprofit organizations, the complications and pressures of working with a potential funder are less of a factor.

Training, technical assistance, and staff development

State and national organizations can provide training and technical assistance to centers in any number of topical areas and in a number of ways—over the phone, on site, or in conferences. Center and staff development opportunities will vary according to the mission of the organization. These organizations often look to locally-based centers for support in running events, information on cutting-edge practices, and ground-level information. Working together, local centers and state and national organizations can advance good practices and become a powerful voice.

One example of such a resource at the national level is Family Support America, which provides information on innovative practice; connects programs in the field through conferences, a web site, listservs, a quarterly magazine, and newsletters; publishes manuals and guides like this one; provides information on policy and news affecting family support practitioners; and provides training and technical assistance on site. For more information, see www.familysupportamerica.org.

Networking

National and state organizations are great resources when you are looking for potential local partners or model programs. Since they generally have a larger field of view than do locally-based centers, they may be able to link your center with another in a different geographic region, allowing you to learn about innovations across the state or country. Networking can occur through referral by the national organization or through meetings at conferences, where you can meet representatives of other centers with similar interests.

Advocacy

As mentioned earlier, state and national organizations offer strong partnerships to local centers in advocating for policies and programs that will benefit their constituents. These organizations can advocate on behalf of family support centers (through direct lobbying efforts), build the capacity of local centers and participants to advocate on their own behalf, and supply local centers with information necessary to respond to the public policy system (through policy alerts). For example, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) posts information on its web page about legislation being considered by Congress and on policy issues relevant to children and families. For example, when Congress and the president are considering budgets, CDF posts its analysis of how the proposed budget will affect programs for children and families. For more information, see www.childrensdefense.org.

Resources and research (tools)

State and national organizations have a wealth of information that may be useful to family support centers: research reports, outreach tools, analyses of legislation, and updates. Some of these tools may be developed by the organization itself in partnership with locally-based centers, which can serve as research sites. These organizations also may act as clearinghouses, collecting tools from other sources as well. For example, Chapin Hall Center for Children is a research organization housed in the University of Chicago. Chapin Hall focuses its work on all children, devoting particular attention to children facing special risks or challenges such as poverty, abuse and neglect, or mental and physical illness. The contexts in which children are supported—primarily their families and communities—are of particular interest in Chapin Hall's research. For more information, see www2-chc.spc.uchicago.edu/index.html.

Universities and Colleges

Local universities and community colleges can be important collaborative partners for family support centers. Increasingly, universities and colleges are seeing connections and partnerships with the communities that house them as an important part of their mission. Building a strong partnership, however, requires getting a clear understanding of how the school is structured (i.e., what academic programs are offered, how it is structured administratively, what its student body looks like).

Providing volunteer staff

Many graduate social work programs, and even some undergraduate programs, require or encourage students to participate in field placements at local nonprofits. Field placements allow students to apply what they're learning in a practice setting and to learn things that they might not be able to in the classroom. Placing students at a field site can help you expand your staff resources and bring some bright and energetic new faces into your center. Remember, however, that field placement students are there to learn. They need to be provided with work experience and opportunities that will help them to learn and grow in their chosen field. This not only means ensuring that they get opportunities to work one-on-one with children and families, but also making sure that staff members are available to supervise them, answer their questions, and help them process their experiences into concrete learning. When researching field placement programs, you may want to focus on the following types of programs:

- schools of social work
- early childhood programs
- childcare credentialing programs

Some universities and colleges maintain directories of volunteer opportunities for students. Getting listed in these directories may be an important way to get volunteers to help out in various ways in your center. Other schools encourage more formal public service opportunities for their students. These can include structured volunteer jobs as well as one-time events like community clean-ups or helping to renovate a building or a site. Contact the schools in your area and ask to speak to someone working on community relations in order to access volunteer opportunities.

Providing concrete resources

Universities and colleges have a host of resources that can support your center. One of the most important may be staff expertise. Universities and colleges, by their very nature, have a broad staff with a wide range of expertise. Consider tapping into your local schools when looking for speakers for center events. Additionally, they have a large number of classrooms and spaces that are often not in use on evenings and weekends. These can be great places to have large events that you might not be able to hold in your center. Finally, universities and colleges also often fund or underwrite services and events in their own communities. Again, contacting someone in community relations is an important first step for accessing these resources.

Providing technical assistance and support

Across the country there are individuals in universities and colleges who have at their fingertips up-to-date information on child development, family dynamics, rural poverty, community violence, and other issues that affect your programs and the families you serve on a day-to-day basis.

Finding the right partner can make that information and expertise available to your center and the families you serve. These partnerships can include continuing education opportunities for front-line staff, support in strategic planning and center development, information on program models, and new research on what works for children and families.

Researching community issues

Universities and colleges also bring expertise to the table in the area of research and information development. While family support centers may not see research as one of their primary missions, the reality is that people with research backgrounds can be important partners in getting the day-to-day work in family support done. The following are just some of the research tasks that an academic partner might be able to help with:

- collecting and analyzing community assessment information
- evaluating your center or helping to develop an evaluation strategy
- researching community issues that affect the families in your center

Some schools house specific research centers that focus on specific types of community issues. Find out whether there are any research centers housed at the schools in your area and whether they are doing work relevant to your center.

How Our Center Does It

The Policy Research Action Group
Chicago, Illinois

The Policy Research Action Group (PRAG)—a network of four universities and 15 community organizations in the Chicago metropolitan area—has been supporting grassroots research projects since 1989. Support for community-based research has been primarily in the form of providing interns (graduate and undergraduate students working for four to eight months), research assistants (more advanced graduate students), and apprentices (community organization staff or volunteers) to work on research projects developed by community organizations. Only projects that involve community-university collaboration are supported. Research projects that are identified by university faculty alone are not funded; instead PRAG puts such researchers in touch with relevant community organizations for development of collaborative projects. The PRAG model or a variation of it has been or is being replicated in other areas—in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and statewide in Ohio.

Sample Community Support Agreement

This Community Support Agreement is an understanding between the Northgate Family Services Commission, the community volunteer, and the child or children and their family. The purpose of this agreement is to create partnerships among community members to ensure that families receive support and guidance from concerned neighbors, friends, and family members. It is hoped that community involvement will provide an opportunity for this family to receive beneficial information and services in the community.

I, ____________________, agree to do the following to meet my obligations as a community volunteer:

___ 1. To provide support and guidance to this family to the best of my ability.

___ 2. To see the child or children face to face at least ________________________ to ensure that their needs are being met.

___ 3. To see or contact the parent or legal guardian at least ____________________ to see if they have any concerns or need specific assistance.

___ 4. To contact the Northgate Family Services Commission if I or the family have specific concerns or questions.

___ 5. To keep all information about this family confidential.

We, members of the __________________ family, agree to do the following:

___ 1. To work with the community volunteer and communicate our accomplishments, needs, and concerns.

___ 2. To allow the community volunteer to see the child or children face to face at least ________________________ .

___ 3. To see or contact the community volunteer at least ____________________ .

___ 4. To contact the Northgate Family Services Commission if I have specific concerns or questions about the community volunteer or other issues.

We understand that our participation in this agreement is voluntary, and we may choose to end our participation at any time by contacting the Northgate Family Services Commission.

____________________________ Volunteer	________________________________ Family Member
____________________________ Agency Representative	________________________________ Family Member

Resources

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Chapter 15

Respecting and Strengthening Culture

Respecting and Strengthening Culture

Principle 4: *Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.*

—Family Support America 1996

At its heart, family support is about supporting the healthy development of children. Healthy development includes both the development of self-identity through an understanding of, and pride in, one's own cultural background and traditions, and the development of acceptance and respect through an understanding of and interest in the background and cultures of others.

Understanding and respecting the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and traditions of families and communities is an important component to doing the work of family support effectively. Culture is the cornerstone of one's identity and informs people's most basic understanding of the world. Respecting and honoring the cultures of family support center participants helps to build on the respectful partnerships that are at the core of family support practice. Effective family support centers play several key roles in relation to culture:

- **They include families from diverse cultures**. All families need support—which means that family support centers should be available to all families in the community. Being truly open and accessible to families across diverse cultures requires extra work. It may mean that staff members have to be multilingual, that materials have to be reprinted in multiple languages, and that specific services or activities need to be developed. The center should constantly evaluate its programs, environment, and structure to ensure that they model inclusion and cultural respect.

- **They support the transmission of cultural heritage**. Families are the vehicles through which cultural traditions, beliefs, values, and practices are most often transmitted. Effective family support centers intentionally support families in this role and help them to overcome barriers in the community and the world at large that prevent them from playing this role. They provide an environment that encourages cultural expression, facilitates cultural celebrations, and acknowledges the role of kin.

- **They help families understand and function in the American mainstream**. While we like to think of the United States as the ultimate "melting pot," the reality is that there is nonetheless a dominant culture, and for families coming from different backgrounds and cultural traditions, it can be a shock. Family support centers help families to understand and acculturate to this society without losing their own cultural heritage.

- **They combat racism and cultural bias**. Unfortunately, the battle against racism and prejudice in American culture has not yet been completely won. While the governmentally sanctioned racism epitomized by slavery or the genocide of Native Americans no longer exists, we still far too often see hate crimes, stereotyping, casual bigotry, and the denial of opportunity. Family support centers can play an important role in this struggle by modeling culturally responsible behavior and sending the message that racism and bias are not appropriate or acceptable at the center, in the community, or in society at large.

Including All Families

Family support centers are meant to be places for all families in the community. To make this a reality, centers must address the cultural barriers to inclusion. The following are ways to begin to do this.

Understand Community Demographics

Understanding the demographic composition of the community is the first step toward developing a plan to include families from all the ethnic and racial backgrounds that make up the community. Start with census data for your community. What ethnic groups are represented? What proportion of the community population do they represent? What is the demographic breakdown within these groups—family composition, age distribution, and income distribution? Talk to other providers to get a sense of who is already serving the different ethnic and cultural groups in your community and where the gaps are. Follow up with some key informant interviews or focus groups to get a sense of the particular service needs or priorities of each of the major ethnic or cultural communities represented. Identify "cultural guides"—individuals from the community with a strong understanding of the culture who can help explain how best to communicate with families in the culture, provide background on cultural traditions and practices, and help delineate priorities and significant issues of families in the community. Questions that you may want to ask cultural guides include the following:

- How do you express respect?
- What actions or behaviors might be considered disrespectful?
- How do you show that you agree or disagree?
- What attitudes and expectations do people have regarding gender?
- What topics or issues are considered taboo?
- How are individuals addressed?
- What are the attitudes and expectations regarding age?
- How do people treat authorities? Subordinates?
- What are the attitudes and expectations regarding family roles?
- How is the relationship between individuals and the larger community viewed?
- What are the attitudes and expectations of parents and children within the family structure?
- How are family and kinship defined?

Create Outreach Materials That Reflect Families' Cultures

For families to truly feel that the center is a place for them, they need to feel that the outreach materials and programs are designed with them in mind. At the simplest level this means that materials need to be printed in the language(s) in which families are most comfortable. In communities where there is a large, non-English speaking population, it will be important to ensure that fliers and brochures are available in the language families speaks. Photographs and illustrations should reflect a variety of family styles and compositions, as well as the cultural groups present in the community. Programs may also want to hire members of ethnic communities in the neighborhood to do one-on-one outreach within the community. Being able to speak to someone who looks like you, speaks your language, and understands your culture can make all the difference.

Develop Culturally Responsive Services

The service structure, like outreach, should take into account the ethnicity, culture, and background of families in the community in ways that will let them know that the center is designed for them. In communities with a large proportion of non-English speaking families, services should be offered in the language spoken in the community. In communities with a multiple non-English speaking populations or with population groups that are not large enough to justify offering the program in an additional language, centers should make translation services available through bilingual staff members, volunteers, college students, or others. Remember that when you ask bilingual staff members to serve as translators, you are asking them to take on a new set of responsibilities. They should be recognized and rewarded accordingly.

Providing culturally responsive services, however, means more than just language competency. It means offering programming in the places that people in the community congregate and ensuring that it builds on traditional patterns of interaction within families and the type of activities and events that people in the community normally engage in. An example of this would be to use a traditional system of community elders as the structure around which to build a mentoring program. The cultural guides identified earlier can help review proposed services, materials, and programmatic tools to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of families and truly reflect their culture and background. Finally, when designing and planning service additions or changes, involve an array of families that reflects the diversity of the community.

Ideas for Working Effectively with Translators

- Orient translators to your program's philosophy and purpose.
- Let the translator know how your agency wants families to be treated—with respect, without judgement, etc.
- Be sure that the translator understands the importance of translating information provided by the family accurately, without softening or editing it.
- Be aware that a single language (e.g., Chinese) can encompass several dialects. Make sure that the translator is fluent in the specific dialect spoken by the family.
- Review any technical terms with the translator to make sure that he or she understands and is prepared to translate them.
- Inform the translator of the meeting's purpose and of any potentially sensitive topics that may arise.
- Ask the translator whether he or she is concerned about the cultural appropriateness of any of the information or questions to be translated, particularly if sensitive topics, such as abuse, severe illness, or sexuality will be discussed. Work with the translator to figure out how to best present that information to the family.
- Be aware of situations in which information of a sensitive nature would make it inappropriate to use a translator who is a family member, of the opposite sex, or a different age. If in doubt, ask the family if they would feel comfortable with a particular person translating.
- Allow time for the translator to establish rapport with the family.
- Debrief with the translator after speaking with the family.

From Chang, De La Rosa Salazar, and Leong 1994.

Remember that the individual you choose as a translator will be seen as a representative of your center. Screen potential translators for interpersonal skills and class attitudes and remember to ask families to evaluate and provide feedback on their experience with translators.

Develop a Culturally Responsive Staff

The ethnic and cultural makeup of the staff is very important. Family support centers should strive to hire a staff that reflects the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds of families in the community. Look for frontline staff members with a strong sense of self, experience, competence, and the sensitivity needed to work with people of different races, cultures, and economic backgrounds.

All staff members, regardless of background, should receive training in the following:

- the customs, traditions, and culture of families in the community
- the language(s) spoken by large proportions of the community (minimally, the ability to say hello, etc.)
- how to discuss racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural issues
- how to address racial bias when it occurs
- understanding how their own culture and background affects their values and decisions
- issues of class and classism
- understanding how children develop a sense of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identity
- the role of culture in a child's development
- appreciating cultural diversity

In addition to building a staff that reflects the community, centers should create diversity within the staff. This models positive cultural interaction, and because they learn from their colleagues on a day-to-day basis, it enhances the staff's ability to work across-culture. Work to create an organizational culture that is open to learning about culture and cultural differences. Cultural responsiveness should be an explicit part of the organization's mission and vision and should be modeled by all staff members, from the director down. Encourage staff members to share information about their own culture and background with families and with each other.

Create an Inclusive Governance Structure

To truly be inclusive, a center must include families from the different cultures that make up the community not only as participants, but also as stakeholders who help shape the center's course.

- During the planning process, family members should be involved in developing the center's mission and goals, designing programs and activities, analyzing families' situations, and conducting outreach.

- The center's goals, mission, and objectives should be written in easily understandable language, translated into the language(s) spoken in the community, and posted where participants can review and comment on them. Participating families should have the opportunity to take part in any decisions that will change the mission or goals of the center.

- The governing body should also reflect the diversity of families in the community—not only in terms of racial and ethnic background, but also in terms of marital status, sexual preference, economic status, and so on. To ensure that parent participation in governance is meaningful, meeting materials (minutes, agendas, proposals) should be available in the primary language of the participants. If necessary, make available someone who can translate for members not fluent in English.

For more information on creating an inclusive planning process, see chapter 2 on strategic planning.

The worksheet at the end of this chapter is intended to help you develop plans for including specific populations both in center activities and services and in overall center governance. Use a separate sheet for each significant population in your community.

Transmitting Cultural Heritage

Culture is the cornerstone of identity and helps create the blueprint for who we are and who we become. Families are the key stakeholders of culture. When a parent chooses what to read to a child, how to punish or praise them, and what clothes to buy them to wear to school, they are engaged in the act of transmitting culture. Each of these decisions reflects a parent's value systems, their understanding of what is "normal" or "proper," and how they were taught to do things by their own parents. Culture is also is a central element of family dynamics and how individuals think of themselves as parents. Family support centers play an important role in helping to both validate and support the transmission of culture from the parent or other family members to the child. Too often, particularly with new immigrant groups, culture is sacrificed to the ideal of "fitting in." Family support centers should stress that teaching culture is an important role that parents play and that one's cultural heritage is something to be treasured and preserved.

Traditions and Expectations About Parenting

There is no one right way to parent. While one of the focuses of family support centers is to provide parents with concrete information on child development and developmentally appropriate parenting, it is important that this information be provided in a culturally responsive manner that starts with, and does not undermine, the parent's cultural traditions and expectations about parenting. Before referring families to materials, classes, support groups, or other resources, provide them with an opportunity to reflect on these issues. This will provide an essential grounding for staff members who will be doing ongoing work with the family and help ensure that the center is referring parents to resources consistent with their background and traditions.

Center activities with parents and children should

- provide opportunities for parents to discuss how they were raised
- provide opportunities for parents to talk about their journey from childhood to parenthood
- help parents create a legacy for their child by consciously adopting positive child-rearing practices that reflect their culture and background
- explain how traditional child rearing helps children grow and develop
- help parents integrate information on child development into their chosen child-rearing practices
- assist parents in understanding their role as mediators of their children's experiences and support them in this role

Child Development Activities

Child development activities, like parenting education, should be consciously constructed so that they reinforce a parent's transmission of their culture to their child rather than undermining it or sending the message that the home culture is somehow inferior to the mainstream culture. Ideally, centers should provide opportunities for children to learn more both about North American culture and language and about their home culture and language.

Children's learning environments should reflect the demographics of the community and of their home culture. Stories and myths from the cultures of families in the community should be incorporated into story hours. Posters, picture books, dolls, and other resources should include images of children that reflect the culture of families in the community. Particularly in the area of language, helping children learn English should be balanced with helping them maintain fluency in their own language. Language barriers between a parent and child can result in intergenerational and family breakdown, the loss of a rich vehicle for transmitting culture and history, and the loss of a source of cultural identification.

All child development curricula, resources, or classes should

- encourage children to learn from their parents and relatives about their family's background, culture, and traditions through oral history projects, the development of family trees, and other tools
- use culturally relevant stories, resources, and materials
- be unbiased, yet able to build on cultural differences and outline cultural similarities

Parent representatives of the various ethnic and cultural backgrounds of participating families should be asked to serve in a review committee for new curricula and resources for child development activities. This will help to ensure that all curricula, resources, or classes are supportive of and responsive to families' cultures and ethnic backgrounds.

How Our Center Does It

Asian Pacific Family Resource Center

San Jose, California

The Asian Pacific Family Resource Center provides culturally sensitive services to families to Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese families. The center recognizes the importance of culture in parent/child relationships. "The children that we work with complain that their parents don't understand them. They have become accustomed to mainstream American society, and it creates a cultural conflict within the family." For this reason, the center offers Cambodian language classes and Cambodian dance classes for children. These cultural classes enable children to obtain a better understanding of the values that their parents are trying to uphold, helping to close the communication gap between parents and children. It also provides youth with cultural pride, increasing their self-esteem and strengthening their identity. Furthermore, the classes serve as a hook for parents. "Parents believe that it is very important for their children to learn the traditional language and culture of their origins. So we offer courses, and the parents see that we understand their culture. Then when we begin challenging them to find new ways of relating to their children, they are willing to listen."

The center also provides specific activities designed to enhance parent/child interaction. One very popular activity among Vietnamese families is a flower-arranging class. For the first half-hour of the weekly class, parents and their children meet as a group to discuss listening and communication skills, as well as the importance of celebrating their relationships. For many of the children and parents, this first half-hour is the most important part of the class, and the discussion can become intense. The last hour of the class is a lesson in flower arrangement, giving parents and children an opportunity to share, cooperate, and practice their new communication skills as they create a floral centerpiece.

Culturally Supportive Networks

Culture is a social phenomenon. Maintaining culture, while not impossible to do in isolation, is easier within the context of a social network. Supporting the development of culturally specific groups within the center's participant pool can help form an important supportive network for families striving to pass on their cultural heritage. By sharing stories, comparing experiences, and remembering together, families can reinforce each other's cultural history. For children, these cultural groupings can provide an important safe environment—somewhere where their accent, the way they do things, and what their parents believe in helps them belong rather than sets them apart.

Here are some suggestions for building culturally supportive networks among participants:

- Develop culturally specific programs—e.g., a parenting group for Latino parents, or a Native American story hour.
- Use ethnically specific holidays such as Dia del Niño, Kwanzaa, or Passover as opportunities to create culturally specific gatherings, where families of the same culture can celebrate together.
- Use current events as an opportunity to rally families of the same cultural or ethnic background around a common issue.
- Provide informal opportunities for families of the same culture to get together.
- Create opportunities for families from specific ethnic groups to define their collective cultural needs and to be active participants in their own support, e.g., support groups, parenting classes, social events, and so on. Remember to consider cultural background when you connect families and individuals as mentors and peer support.
- Make sure to inform new families who enter your center of culturally specific programming, participant groups, or activities.
- Reinforce specific cultural traditions and values as coping mechanisms and key sources of strength for families and communities. For example, African American families have a rich tradition of surviving adverse times through their strong spiritual beliefs, and so on.
- Provide opportunities for families from specific ethnic groups to play an active role in designing programs and activities that are organized around culturally specific themes and aimed toward specific cultural audiences.

Circulos de Familia

Circulos de familia (family circles) are small groups for Latino seniors—mostly women and immigrants—where participants are encouraged to share personal stories and to explore the many and complex social, cultural, and political contexts that shape their stories. Each participant shares experiences, obtains useful information, and gains practical knowledge about the ways things are done in this country and culture, and develops skills that help place feelings of alienation within a broader context, relieving the pressure of being "the only one." In the process of telling their own stories, participants foster individual and collective strength, identify forces that limit their lives, and reconstruct the bonds of mutual help that have been torn by immigration. At the same time, _circulos de familia_ become a bridge to the new culture. At the end of the series of _circulos_ discussions, participants realize that they are able to make new friends, find confidants, and discover allies in the journey of life that requires experiencing a new country, culture, and language.

From Sotomayor, *1994*.

Rediscovering Traditions and History

In the United States, the culture of far too many families has been lost to them. African Americans whose ancestors were brought here as slaves may not even know the name of the place that they came from. Native Americans who faced genocide and decades of policies consciously designed to rip their families apart and eradicate their cultural roots are trying to preserve languages and customs that have been under attack for hundreds of years. The first-generation child of immigrant parents may find that they are assimilated to the point that they find it impossible to teach their own children the language or the customs of their parents. Family support centers can play a key role in helping families to learn about, take pride in, and teach about cultures and traditions that have been lost to them.

- Invite families to join in culturally specific holidays and celebrations at the center.
- Bring in speakers, books, videotapes, and other resources families can use to learn about their home culture.
- Keep traditional objects on display and readily available at the center, and make sure that staff understand their use and symbolism so that they can explain them to families.
- Integrate traditional values and customs explicitly into programming so that families can learn about them through their day-to-day participation in the program.

How Our Center Does It

Walbridge Caring Communities

Caring Communities' philosophy of Afrocentricity helps restore hope, purpose, and pride among the children and families. The center offers instruction, counseling, and action, exploring the numerous strengths, achievements, and contributions of Africans and African Americans, as well as weaknesses and complexities of lifestyles. The major aspects of the center's concept of Afrocentricity are

- **spirituality (urging parents and residents to reacquaint themselves and their children with their oneness with creation and their Creator)**
- **self-identity (instruction on African and African American history/culture and the African diaspora)**
- **extended family (emphasis on recognizing the extended family as a basic and legitimate family structure and support system)**
- **unity (emphasis on self-help and community empowerment)**
- **value system (emphasis on recognizing the Nguzo Saba as a viable value system and thus a criterion for assessing growth and development)**
- **conflict resolution (emphasis on utilizing nonviolent conflict-resolution techniques)**
- **rites of passage (emphasis on establishing specific guidelines for manhood/womanhood training that incorporate rite-of-passage ceremonies)**

From Goetz and Peck 1994, *37*.

- Create mentoring relationships between families who have become relatively acculturated and families who still have a strong sense of their history and traditions. This can be a valuable, supportive relationship, with acculturated families helping to explain American culture and values and less acculturated families serving as guides to the home culture. Including seniors/elders in this activity can be rewarding for them as well as for the center because they bring a wealth of experiences.
- Help families develop family trees to trace their ancestry and roots.
- Collect histories from many families. These histories can help create a cultural mosaic, with

each family's memories and history helping to create a sense of the culture as a whole.
- Utilize cultural specific "creeds" such as *Nguzo Saba* (Principles of Kwanzaa) to reinforce cultural self-determination and pride.
- Create an atmosphere that encourages the collective responsibility, commitment, and consciousness of cultural groups who participate—culturally diverse groups must see that the success of the program depends on their collective input.

Celebrating Diverse Cultures

The richness of the cultural tapestry in the United States is one of our key strengths. We are not so much a melting pot as a mosaic, a society made up of people from different cultures and backgrounds, each sharing an American identity but also bringing his or her own history and perspective to the table. Each of us has a unique opportunity in our lives not only to live with, but also to learn from, the strengths and perspectives of numerous cultural traditions. By emphasizing how each culture is a critical and unique piece of a larger picture, family support centers can help families understand, respect, and appreciate the cultural differences between themselves and others. Being open to these opportunities helps us put our own cultural background in perspective.

- Have potlucks where each family brings food from their own culture.
- Ask families to share a cultural holiday with others. Have a Mexican American family share with others what the Day of the Dead means to them, ask an African American family share with others what they do to celebrate Kwanzaa, or ask a Muslim family to share how Eid is celebrated in their household.
- Create an environment that reflects positive images of different cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. Make sure that posters, pictures, brochures and visuals show racial and ethnic diversity.
- Celebrate cultural diversity in the center's everyday activities, not just on holidays. Using activities like cooking, dress, and child rearing helps families not only appreciate differences but also the ways in which, despite differences, they are alike. For example, in the center described below, the use of cooking classes not only provides a fun and interesting way to talk about differences, but underlines how at base we all share a commmon concern—getting food on the table.

How Our Center Does It

The Parent Services Project
Fairfax, California

The Parent Services Project conducts monthly ethnic cooking classes and creates a garden by planting herbs and vegetables used by the cultures represented in the center. After sharing recipes, participants discover that they use some of the same vegetables and herbs but prepare food differently or have different names for them. This activity creates common ground between ethnic groups and eliminates ignorance caused by lack of exposure to other cultures.

- For centers working in communities or serving populations that are primarily of one ethnic or cultural group, providing opportunities for families to experience and learn from the cultural experience of others is especially important. Partnering with another family support center or an organization that works with families of different ethnic groups can provide an important opportunity for cultural exchange, as can encouraging families to attend and learn from different cultural events around the community or the larger area.

- Use national events like Asian Heritage Month and African American History Month as opportunities to teach about the historical figures and cultural contributions of different ethnic and cultural groups.

Understanding the Dominant Culture

Too often we think of culture as something foreign and different from the way that we do things in the United States. What we don't always recognize is that our society has a culture of its own that this is transmitted in countless ways—through what is taught in our schools, what is covered in our newspapers, and what makes it onto television, to name a few. For families of different cultural traditions, particularly new immigrants, the values and attitudes at the core of North American culture may be a mystery. Whether they feel that these values are good or bad, understanding them and how they affect behavior and interactions on a day-to-day basis is an important tool for family success.

Values and Assumptions in the Dominant American Culture

- the importance of individualism and privacy
- a belief in the equality of all individuals
- informality in interactions with others
- an emphasis on the future, change, and progress
- a belief in the general goodness of humanity
- an emphasis on the importance of time and punctuality
- a high regard for achievement, action, work, and materialism
- pride in being direct and assertive

Lynch and Hanson 1992.

There are many things that family support centers can do to help families—both those from different cultural background and those from the dominant culture—understand how the dominant culture affects their lives.

A Cultural Resource

Family support centers can serve as a resource for information on how the dominant culture and institutions function, and how national, state, and local policies affect children and families. Helping families understand U.S. culture is a key step to helping them negotiate life in this country.

- Family support centers can play the role of cultural guides to families struggling to understand U.S. society. Think through the questions for cultural guides listed earlier in this chapter—how would one answer them for this society?
- Pair families who have immigrated recently with families that have been here longer who can serve as resources and answer questions for them.
- Provide structured learning opportunities, e.g., classes, question and answer sessions, and so on, for families to learn about U.S. culture and history. For people studying for their citizenship exams, these can be important concrete resources.

Help for Developing Cultural Skills

For many families acculturation is a goal. They want their children to learn English, to be accepted, and to learn what they need to succeed in U.S. society. Family support centers should be ready to help them reach this goal. They can also help families acculturate without assimilating by developing the skills they need to succeed in this culture without losing their own cultural identities. (Chang, De La Rosa Salazar, and Leong 1994) Centers can:

- provide ESL classes.
- help participants understand how American cultural values come into play in crucial events such as job interviews.
- help families process cultural misunderstandings—both those that happen within the center and outside.
- help families understand the educational, social service, and health systems in the U.S.
- provide families with a guide in their own language about community resources, and provide information on how to use the guide.

Teaching Social Skills

One of the most important things one can understand about a culture and society, particularly the one in which one lives, is how to get things done. These things can be as simple as accessing services, enrolling a child in school, or becoming part of a community council, or as intricate as filing a discrimination claim, becoming a foster parent, or combating an eviction. Regardless of the issue, families without language or cultural skills are at a disadvantage within many of the institutions in our society. They are often misunderstood or ignored by agencies or systems that may lack the resources, staff, or commitment necessary to making sure that they are heard. Family support centers can help families access these systems and institutions and interact with them effectively. They can:

- provide advocacy training for families (see chapter 5).
- hire peer coaches to support families in their advocacy efforts by helping with translation and helping them to practice articulating their concerns and goals.
- help parents understand how decisions are made, at both the institutional and policy levels.
- provide information on legislation or policies that will affect families.
- provide families with an overview of civil rights in the U.S. and how they impact issues related to language, immigration, education, health, and child protective services.
- provide information to parents on how to challenge institutions or systems that infringe on their rights.

Understanding Cultural Background as an Asset

While we may not always recognize it, understanding a nondominant culture is a tremendous asset in U.S. society. In a culture as multilingual, multiethnic, and globally engaged as ours, the ability to speak more than one language, the experience of having lived in another country, or even extensive exposure to another culture, is a strength and an advantage. More important, we value cultural roots. We tend to define ourselves by our cultural roots, as Arab Americans, Italian Americans, or African Americans—even if our families have been here for generations. To help build cultural appreciation and awareness, family support centers can:

- help families understand and articulate that the culturally specific skills and experiences they bring to a job, a committee, or an advisory body are assets.
- help families learn how to communicate their cultural perspective.
- help families understand how their experiences with racial discrimination or institutional racism have informed their political perspective and understanding of how U.S. society works.

Moving Beyond "Color-blindness"

Related to the analogy of the "melting pot" is the notion that this society is "color-blind" when working with people of color. While this notion arose as a rationale for changing unlawful practices against and unequal treatment of people of color, the reality is that a "color-blind" perspective does not take into account the fact that people of color continue to face differential treatment, both subtle and overt, by people from the dominant culture, and it does not appreciate the differences that each culture brings to the world.

Family support centers can take an active role in overcoming the limitations of this perspective by:

- actively recruiting a diverse staff to purposefully model people of different backgrounds working together in harmony.
- creating opportunities for staff members with diverse cultural backgrounds to learn about each other through honest, open dialogue and ongoing positive interaction.
- creating an environment that recognizes that all people have similar basic needs but that each culture addresses these needs from a unique perspective, history, and experience.
- fostering awareness that supposedly "color-blind" or "color-neutral" tests like the SAT, taken to qualify for college, or the Stanford Bennett IQ test, which is given to elementary school children, are based on middle-class experiences and reflect the dominant culture.

Understanding Cultural Influences on the Dominant Culture

As mentioned above, in U.S. society we tend to think of culture as something specific to minority groups, foreigners, or our own immigrant pasts. We don't often stop to reflect about how our own national or even regional culture permeates our lives and influences what we do on a day-to-day basis. Family support centers can help dominant-culture families recognize how their culture influences what they eat, how they dress, how they interact with others, and their goals for themselves and their children. Helping these families become culturally self-aware helps dispel the notion that the way they do things (or that the way we do things in the U.S.) is "normal," while the way others do things is not. This self-awareness can open the door to curiosity and interest in other cultures and can be the first step toward combating prejudice and racism.

Combating Racism and Bias

In spite of tremendous progress, racism, oppression, sexism, homophobia, and so on are very much alive in our society. One of the biggest difficulties in challenging racism and bias in U.S. society is that it can be both subtle and diffuse. Racism separates individuals or people with the purpose of allowing one group to receive preferential treatment and advantage. It is generally predicated on fear and ignorance.

One cannot understand the dynamics of racism without first examining the issue of *power*. Power in the context of dominance is generally the basis on which racism is encountered. When those who are in power are reluctant to share resources, decisions, or authority, it creates problems. In the dynamics of racism, the people from a dominant culture usually perceive themselves to have a status superior to those from the minority cultures. Those in power avoid accountability to those with less power and pursue an agenda that is beneficial to only them. Family support centers should actively seek to eradicate racism.

Recognizing Stereotypes

Most of us at some point have been either victims of oppression or perpetrators of some sort of stereotyping or bias, if not both. Family support centers can take concrete steps to help participants be tolerant and accept basic cultural differences when interacting with people different from themselves.

Here are some suggestions for gaining meaningful insight in a safe and nonthreatening environment:

- Create opportunities for staff members and families to become more aware of actions, beliefs, or words that promote bias.
- Make a conscious effort to break down barriers and stereotypes—that African Americans living in public housing are lazy and want to be on welfare. Help families analyze how racism and bias are reflected in commonly accepted interactions. For example, tape a popular television show and watch it with families. Ask the families to identify stereotypes that are used in the portrayals in the program. Discuss these stereotypes and how they affect perceptions of families in that racial or ethnic group.
- Conduct culturally specific or joint workshops and/or seminars that openly explore and address the issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on.
- Create opportunities for people to explore issues of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in same-culture groups and in groups with people from different cultures. This will allow people of different cultures to learn to address these issues in culturally diverse groups.

How Our Program Does It

Carole Robertson Center for Learning/Centro de Aprendizaje Carole Robertson

Chicago, Illinois

As a multicultural agency in an urban community, the Carole Robertson Center is dedicated to justice, respect, and empowerment. The program affirms the cultural and ethnic identities of the families served by providing bilingual services and special cultural events, and by establishing cultural collaboratives with other agencies. Each year the Carole Robertson Center sponsors the "International Taste of CRCL," a special event for parents that celebrates their different ethnic and racial identities through food, arts and crafts, and entertainment. The Carole Robertson Center also serves as one of the lead agencies of the Chicago Children's Coalition, a cultural collaborative of eight local school-age childcare providers serving culturally diverse groups of children.

At the heart of the Carole Robertson Center's multicultural efforts is an Anti-Bias Curriculum. Staff and parents came together to develop this curriculum and as a result both have benefited. The Anti-Bias Curriculum covers such topics as gender anatomy and identity, age, ethnicity/cultural diversity, and visual and hearing impairments. This curriculum is at the core of the Center's efforts to help children develop positive cultural, ethnic, and racial identities. In addition to the Anti-Bias Curriculum, the Carole Robertson Center sponsors a variety of creative events, including a Spring Festival and a Talent Show/Summer Art Fair, designed to help children appreciate their own racial and cultural identities as well as those of others. Staff members orchestrate and implement activities that enrich the learning processes of both parents and children. Through their efforts, staff hope that children and parents will learn to respect and to react sensitively to each other.

Combating Staff Biases

It is our personal experiences that set the stage for the way we relate to cultures that are different than our own. If these experiences are based upon ignorance or stereotyping, then our perceptions will be negative and consequently will produce negative reactions and mistrust. To work effectively with people of diverse cultures, it is critical for family support center staff members to develop an understanding and appreciation of the differing needs, values, customs, and beliefs that come with cultural differences.

- Help staff members develop an understanding of their own cultural experiences in relation to others so that they can avoid misconception and negativity when interacting with people from other cultures.
- Create opportunities for ongoing antiracism and antibias training, and for staff members to develop an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.

Identifying and Challenging Discrimination and Racism

Institutional racism is bias that is embedded in the psychology, economy, and society of a culture. Because of this embedded bias, the institutions that make up the culture can treat groups of individuals differently, either by denying them opportunity or by penalizing them unfairly. Generally, interpersonal racism is a practice based on ignorance, fear, and lack of knowledge of cultures other than one's own. Here are some suggestions for ways to confront racism and explore alternatives:

- Encourage staff members and families to speak out against any injustice or inequity that is experienced by community members or that exists in the community.
- Mobilize families and the communities to express outrage at hate crimes or other injustice based on racism or bias. Organize candlelight vigils, letter-writing campaigns, or mass media campaigns. For example, when the Ku Klux Klan wanted to march in a suburban community of Chicago, citizens called in the media and physically protested with signs and interviews. As a result, the larger community joined in, got a court order, and stopped the march.
- Foster dialogue about issues of social justice.
- Send a clear message that behavior motivated by racial or cultural hatred will not be tolerated in the center. Develop a policy that prohibits racist or biased actions or statements in the center, and make sure that this policy is posted somewhere visible to all center participants. Always address incidents of racism or bias when they occur. Go over the policy statement with the offender and explain how their behavior violated your policy.
- Speak out against injustice and inequity that people experience in their community.

How Our Center Does It

Human Relations Foundation

Chicago, Illinois

The Chicago Dinners program of the Human Relations Foundation of Chicago brings together groups of 10 to 14 community leaders from different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds to discuss issues related to race. Both hosts and guests are individuals who have volunteered to take part in "an open and honest conversation about race: their experiences, their feelings, their fears and their hopes." Prior to each scheduled dinner, hosts are given tips for managing the dialogue, and both hosts and guests receive information packets to help stimulate the dialogue.

Helping Families Respond to Racism Bias or Classism

Being the victim of racism and bias can be emotionally and psychologically scarring. It can leave victims with a sense of distrust, a feeling of impotence or vulnerability, or just plain mad. Helping families recover from the hurt and anger of oppression takes time and ongoing efforts.

- Develop a written policy and/or mission statement that clearly gives people of all groups an equal share in the decision-making process, in the distribution of resources, and full participation in the development of the center. Families need to see people from their own culture or who look like them with the power to make policy decisions and decisions on how resources are to be distributed. This creates a sense of ownership and helps demonstrate that the power is being shared equally. In other words, demonstrate through action that racism is not an issue and that no group has more power another.

- Give families a chance to verbalize their experiences of racism and process its ramifications. Conduct culturally specific or joint workshops and/or seminars to allow participants to openly explore and address the hurt and pain they have experienced as a result of racism, homophobia, and so on.

How Our Center Does It

The Parent Leadership Institute
Palo Alto, California

The Parents Leadership Institute in Palo Alto, California conducts a workshop called "Tackling Racism: An Evening for White Parents." The workshop is geared to giving European American parents living in a diverse community an opportunity to discuss their experiences and become part of the solution to the problems of their community. Parents use "listening techniques" as tools to combat racism. Another workshop, "Healing the Hurts of Racism," uses these listening techniques to confront the hurts of racism and to build a proud, diverse community that enriches the lives the participants and the lives of their children.

Combating Ignorance Through Knowledge

Truly challenging one's own biases requires a willingness to embrace the discomfort of being exposed to experiences and perspectives totally different from one's own. Stereotypes are often built from incomplete knowledge about other groups or cultures—"knowledge" that ignores the strengths, achievements, and legacies of the stereotyped group. Moreover, stereotypes tend to ignore the ways in which the needs and priorities of others are similar to our own. This incomplete picture can serve as a justification for racism and bias by creating a sense of an "other," who is not as good, as deserving, or as human as the members of our own group.

Racism and bias perpetuate inferiority and tendencies to blame minorities for the crime and poverty they are often victims of. Family support centers can provide opportunities to develop realistic understandings of other cultural groups by supporting dialogue across cultures, promoting the exchange of cultural experience, and exploring how we may have been "miseducated" about other cultures and our own.

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- Promote understanding of the influences that negatively affect the cultural self-identity of minority individuals or families, e.g., poverty, unemployment, lack of education, geographic location, and immigration status. All of these can cause members of minorities to view themselves as "less than" or "inferior to" members of the dominant culture.

- Create opportunities for families of different backgrounds to identify areas of common ground and to accept and value the differences among them. Just because someone is poor, unemployed, less educated, a "hillbilly," or does not have citizenship status, does not mean that he or she is inferior or has no ambition to strive for a better life.

Conclusion

The role of family support centers in confronting issues of race and culture is complex, challenging, and multifaceted. On the simplest level, each center needs to ensure that its services are relevant and useful to all of the families in the community. This involves consciously ensuring that outreach, services, and planning processes are constructed so that they are inclusive and so that culture is not a barrier to participation. Second, centers play an important role in sending the message that culture is important. By supporting the transmission of culture from parents to children and by serving as places for participants to learn about and appreciate cultural diversity, family support centers help underline the essential role that culture plays in our society. Third, family support centers act as a bridge between families from minority communities and the dominant culture. Finally, family support centers actively wage war against racism and bias in our society. Centers must stay alert to the possibility of racism invading their agencies. Staff members must model cultural responsiveness in their relationships with each other and with parents by demonstrating respect and acceptance of cultural differences. Understanding one's own cultural heritage provides the foundation for working more effectively with culturally diverse groups. Learning about the deeper, more complex aspects of culture—values, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes—requires commitment, time, and ongoing interaction. Family support centers must act deliberately to increase their knowledge and gain insight into diverse cultures so that they can eliminate misconceptions and stereotypes. Open, honest dialogue must take place to inform people about racism and bias so that they may process and defuse the racist practices both of society-at-large and of individuals.

Worksheet: Inclusiveness

Significant Population: ______________________________

Why do we need to target this group (answers may relate to the groups current proportion among community residents; its growth rate; its degree of isolation; the appearance that it is not served by other service providers; barriers faced by the group, such as racism and discrimination):

____

____

Demographic Detail (information may include the number of individuals and families, data on family composition, age breakdown, and income distribution, etc.) ______________________________

____

____

Special Issues (information on priorities or issues specific to the population, e.g., acquiring citizenship, maintaining linguistic identity, discomfort with public services, etc.; information should include anything that will affect not only what services are offered, but also how they are offered):

____

____

Specialized Outreach (information on specific outreach tools needed to reach this population, e.g., translated materials, new visuals, community outreach workers, etc.): ______________________________

____

____

Targeted Services: ______________________________

Details (describe the specifics of how the service will be structured to be responsive to the needs of families of the culture to be targeted): ______________________________

____

____

Individuals to involve in planning and governance (information should include residents who live in the community and represent culturally diverse viewpoints): ______________________________

____

____

Tools needed to support their involvement (e.g., translators, translated materials, stipends, childcare, etc.): ______________________________

____

____

Resources

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Chapter 16

Outreach and Communications

Outreach and Communications

Promoting family support—especially your center's successes with families—to the general public is crucial to the sustainability of community-based family support centers. As a program as well as a policy agenda, family support has the potential to help keep America's families, grassroots programs, and the government in alignment on family issues.

In an era of increased competition for resources, when policymakers and a skeptical public face are bombarded with information, it is necessary to have an effective communications capacity to make your center stand out from the crowd of other social service programs. As such, your center must begin to view itself as a "brand" to be marketed—to funders, to policymakers, to the public (a brand is a set of activities or values that highlights the uniqueness of your family support center in the eyes of your target "customers"). How these important "customers" perceive your program's services is as important as the implementation of your program's services. If program participants like your "brand"—i.e., perceive your center as a welcoming place where they can access community services—they are more likely to return to your center and assist with outreach efforts. The more knowledge about your "brand" that funders possess—i.e., the more that they perceive your center as an effective family support program—the more willing they are to associate themselves with your program via grants.

Effective communications can result in the following benefits for your center:

- increased name recognition and prestige with donors, making it more likely that your center will receive grants to expand services and activities
- greater knowledge about your program's work among key constituencies (e.g., parents, policymakers); increased credibility
- increased demand for family support services
- increased awareness of family support and of your center's value for the general public
- increased funding for your center due to its increased profile

Outreach and Marketing to Diverse Groups

Increasingly, families come in many different configurations. A growing number of single-parent households, headed by mothers as well as fathers, care for and nurture children and need the support that a family support center can provide. Additionally, there is an expanding population of extended families in which grandparents and aunts or uncles assume the role of caregivers for the children of their relatives. They need to be connected to community resources. These realities require family support centers to meet the challenge of conducting effective outreach and being programmatically responsive to a highly diverse constituency.

Effective communications will build your center's reputation and help cement its long-term success and sustainability. Many not-for-profit centers cease operations in a few years. A key difference between the centers that cease operations and those that survive is the ability to communicate to others the importance of the center, with the goal of building financial and public support.

Many family support centers worry that undertaking communications activities will divert time and resources away from serving families. However, effective communications—with your center's surrounding community, the public, policymakers, and funders—is crucial to your center's survival and growth. Communications should be an integral marketing vehicle to accomplish your center's mission, and many activities can be done at minimal cost. Involving center participants, volunteers, and board members early on can also generate creative ideas for promoting your center and help divide up tasks. Bringing attention to your center's activities also balances media stories about families and informs the general public about the potential for change through family support.

This chapter focuses on the communications process for family support centers. The chapter covers a step-by-step process consisting of three major areas:

- outreach: getting families in the door
- publicity and promotion: getting the public to support your center
- crisis management: maintaining your center's reputation

This section takes your center through the steps for establishing an effective communications capacity on a limited budget, including staffing, creating linked outreach and publicity plans, maximizing your current publications and other materials, and planning for and managing public relations crises. The chapter also suggests activities to get you started and provides checklists to assist your center as it builds its communications capacity.

A key idea that infuses the chapter is the importance of relationships—with families and your board of directors, with media, and with collaborative partners—in spreading the word about your center and building its reputation. Your communications efforts should be integrated with your center's other activities in order to maintain a consistent image and mission. A consistent image also requires recruiting someone on your staff or board to serve as the point person for coordinating your promotion efforts.

There are real opportunities for your center to influence public opinion on family issues and promote family support among policymakers. Effective outreach shows community skeptics that your organization is doing valuable work. Effective communication builds your center's reputation as a locally recognized, credible leader on behalf of family support. Media coverage can help establish your center's reputation—and these media relationships will be vital should someone make damaging accusations against your center that captures the public's attention.

Community Outreach: Getting Families in the Door

Outreach is an extremely important function in effective family support centers. It helps to ensure that the center reaches all the families in the community who need it, especially those who are socially isolated and unlikely to come to the door without a preexisting sense of connection to a center. Creating a strong community perception of the value of your center is one of the best forms of outreach available. However, finding effective strategies for getting families involved with your center can be a challenge. Here are some tips on how to get families to use your center's services.

Identify Your Target Population(s)

The target of your outreach efforts are families that your center would like to serve but is currently not serving. This may be different from the population in your community or even the population already using your services. For example, you may have a goal of engaging all new fathers but choose to target your outreach efforts to teen fathers because you have determined that they are not currently utilizing your services.

You can use the following steps to help determine your center's target population:

1. **Review community demographics.**
   Review the information that you collected for your community assessment or other sources of community demographics. Identify any growing ethnic populations, changes in age distribution, or populations who would particularly need the services your center offers. For example, if your center focuses on families with children three years old and younger, you may want to determine which groups in your community have the largest number of children in that age range.

2. **Review current participant demographics.**
   Look at how your current participant demographics compare to the community's demographics. Are there groups in the community who are not using your center?

3. **Review service utilization and demand.**
   When developing an outreach plan, it is important to keep in mind your center's current capacity and the utilization of its existing services. If you have a waiting list for your early childhood services, you may not want to conduct an outreach campaign to families with young children. Otherwise you may end up with a number of disappointed families.
   Underutilized services may need targeted outreach. However, there may be some spillover. A family who comes to your center because the parents saw fliers for after-school programs may have a preschool-aged child for whom they are trying to find a preschool program as well.

4. **Review current and prospective grants.**
   Examine both the grants that your center currently has and any grants you expect to be targeting in the future. Do they list any specific populations whose needs the dollars are supposed to address?

5. **Review your center's mission and goals.**
   Your outreach efforts should stem from your center's mission and goals.

6. **Identify groups who may be in need of your services.**
   Talk to others in your community. Are there specific groups or populations that are isolated or in need of family support services? You may want to talk with kindergarten teachers in your community. Are there populations of children entering their classes who are not coming to school ready to learn? Talk to local religious leaders about whether members of their congregations are experiencing difficulty accessing support services. Start with your center's mission statement and goals when formulating questions and preparing for conversations.

Learn About the Families You Are Trying to Reach

Before you begin your outreach efforts, you will need to collect a body of information to make that effort effective. Start with conversations with individuals who represent your target population—this could be members of that population, individuals who work closely with them, leaders of their community, or others who have special insight.

- What services do they use? (This includes informal services such as grocery stores, Laundromats, and parks.)
- Where do they spend their time?
- What organizations do they belong to?
- What strengths do they possess?
- What community organizations and individuals do they trust and respect?
- What are their priorities and concerns, both for themselves and for their children?
- Why would they be interested in the services and activities your center provides?

This information will help you to develop an outreach strategy that is tailored to the particular families you are trying to reach. It will help your center develop partners for outreach, determine where to focus outreach efforts, and better understand how to get target populations interested in your center. Exploring the "what's in it for them?" benefits that your center offers its target population will encourage you to focus on services that they find appealing rather than on what the center believes should be appealing. Appealing to families' strengths also reduces the sense of stigma that many may feel about receiving social services (even voluntary ones).

Your center may want to collect this information through interviews, focus groups, or even a survey of the target population. For more information on using any of these techniques, see the section on community assessment in chapter 2.

A family support center in a low-income housing project in Baltimore found that using traditional methods of recruiting for parenting classes just did not work. The number of participants was extremely low, so they asked a few parents to help them design a new and innovative approach to parenting classes. These parents found out that many parents who should come to the parenting classes were at home watching soap operas, so they purchased a television set and hosted a daily parenting class using soap operas as a teaching tool. At the end of a soap opera, they discussed issues arising from each episode, including those of human sexuality, family relationships, parenting, self-esteem, and so on. To aid in recruitment and involvement, the center provided transportation and childcare, as well as popcorn.

Jeppson, Thomas, Markward, Kelly, Kiser, and Diehl 1997

Recruiting Fathers: One Center's Strategies

Cardinal Spellman Head Start in New York City took notice of its lack of father-figure participants and decided to reach out to this group more aggressively. It started with a Fathers' Day "fathers only" event where children and male figures in their lives could play and feast on barbeque. Fliers were sent home with every child enrolled in the program to recruit men significant in the children's lives.

After this initial event proved successful (and continues to grow in popularity each year), staff members expanded their efforts to enlist significant male figures in children's lives. Intake interviewers are trained to ask, "Is there any male that the child has a steady relationship with?" This question is asked again informally by social services staff members in the lobby and by teachers outside the classroom and on home visits. Staff members are also sure to interact with men when they drop off and pick up the children. "They talk to men about their children, inform them of future events, and actively call upon them to contribute their skills to the program."

Actively seeking out men, acknowledging their interest and influence in their interest and influence in their children's lives, and recognizing the many forms their contributions to the program can take are what makes the difference to these men.

Adapted from Levine, Murphy, and Wilson 1993, *55*

Develop Your Outreach Plan

In order to monitor the effectiveness of your outreach efforts, your center will need to draft an outreach plan. Having a written plan helps ensure that outreach activities will be implemented as planned and that the targeted population will be reached. Your outreach plan should include the following:

- **A description of your target population(s).**
- **Frequency of outreach.** Whether your center will engage in periodic or continuous outreach will determine the specific strategies used.
- **Outreach locations.** These are locations where you will be able to make contact or leave information. (The first three questions in the section just above will help you determine key outreach locations).
- **Key contacts.** These are individuals who have relationships with members of the target population and can serve as ambassadors for the center. They may invite you to speak with members of the target population, describe your center to the families you are trying to reach, or help refer individuals to your center. (The fourth question in the section just above will help you to determine these key contacts).
- **Outreach strategies.** These are the specific strategies that your center will use.

- **Outreach goals.** This is the specific number of families or individuals that you are trying to reach. Remember to think about your center's current capacity and how well utilized its current services are.

- **Status.** Monitor your center's progress toward fulfilling its outreach goals with status updates. This will also help determine the intensity of your outreach efforts at any given time.

Outreach to Youth

The first step for any center working with youth is to get them to walk in the door. Adolescents will not come if they think your program is going to be an extension of their school day or that it is really just babysitting disguised as a "youth program." If the center already hosts periodic events such as family nights, incorporate activities that teens will like, such as movie screenings, dancing to the latest music, and pizza. Encourage parents to bring their teens to these events. To draw additional teens to the center, plan fun after-school events and advertise in local schools, community centers or parks, fast-food restaurants, and other places where adolescents gather.

Once youth are coming through the front door, provide fun, interactive things to do. In other words, while something like homework assistance can be an important component of a youth program, it shouldn't take up the entire time. Other time should be spent in interactive activities where teens have an opportunity to socialize with other youth and develop friendships.

Here are some possible activities:

- Screen a teen-oriented movie or TV show once a week. Afterwards, start a discussion about the choices that the characters made and what the youth in the program would have done differently.

- Allow some down time each day for youth to just relax and socialize with their friends. Give them 20 or 30 minutes of "hang time" each day.

- Schedule periodic dance parties where youth can show their talents as DJs or musicians, or mingle with their peers as dancers.

- Involve teens in a "teens speak" focus group discussion about important issues in their lives and how each perceives these issues. Help them to examine their values and make their ideas concrete.

- Make the center teen-friendly so that youth can identify with the setting. Adolescents may be reluctant to come to a family support center if they think the center is chiefly for adults. Set aside a "teen room" with couches, books, magazines aimed at youth, and a radio.

Make sure to involve the families participating in your center in developing your outreach plan and in your larger outreach efforts. They may be your best informants on whether there are groups in the community that you should be reaching but aren't currently targeting. They can also help the center develop outreach materials and strategies that are truly appealing to area families. They can also be invaluable in gauging what language resonates with families and what doesn't. There are checklists at the end of chapter that are designed to help you develop an outreach plan for your center.

Implementing Outreach Strategies

Your outreach strategies will depend on the population you are targeting, the resources your center can dedicate, and your community. Below are some ideas to help your center develop its outreach strategies:

Develop written materials

Written outreach materials are useful because they broaden your outreach efforts. They are relatively inexpensive to produce and disseminate, and they are a relatively unintrusive way to spread the word about your center.

Your center should have brochures and fliers available in the community at all times to raise awareness about the center. In addition, you may want to have specific fliers or brochures made up for individual services or for specific populations you are trying to reach. When developing written materials or brochures, remember to

- give people a reason to come
- include a list of the services you provide
- provide information about any costs, if any, for the highlighted services or activities
- let people know who is eligible to participate
- make sure that materials reflect the cultural orientation of the community
- include your center's mission statement
- include information on your hours of operation, location, and contact person
- take into account the literacy levels and language of your target population
- ensure that you include pictures of individuals who resemble the families you are trying to reach and graphics that reflect their culture
- make sure that your fliers and brochures are colorful and eye-catching

The quality of word processing and graphics packages nowadays means that you can develop your own brochures and fliers on a desktop computer. The sample flier on the next page was developed in Microsoft Word, a common desktop publishing program.

Use word of mouth

One of the best ways to get people interested in your center is to encourage the families who are currently participating to spread the word. Make sure to tell participants that if they like the center, they should tell others about it. When you send out monthly calendars or invitations to events, make sure to remind families to invite others they know to attend. Outreach fliers and brochures should especially be given to center participants who are interested in spreading the word at other community events. Buttons or T-shirts with your family support center name on them also provide an opportunity for staff members and center participants to talk about the center's work. Offering small incentives for current center participants to bring friends to the center is another effective strategy.

Go door-to-door

Many family support centers use door-to-door outreach or home visits as a way to reach out to families in the community. This can be done during home visiting activities, by specialized outreach staff, or by volunteers and family participants. Make sure that outreach workers reflect the diversity in the community. The most important thing is that individuals doing door-to-door outreach on behalf of your center have the tools that they need to do their job effectively. These may include the following:

- **Information about the center**. Outreach workers should not only be equipped with brochures but have the information memorized so that they can explain it one-on-one to those who are interested.

- **Training.** Anyone who does outreach should have good people skills and basic training in how to interact respectfully with others, initiate a conversation, and understand and cope with rejection. The outreach worker should also be well versed in the center's mission, goals, and structure.

- **Goodwill gifts.** Centers often use outreach presents to establish a sense of connection and goodwill in early outreach visits. For example, a basket with some diapers, formula, and information on child development would be a good outreach gift for a new mom. It not only gives her tangible items that she needs but also provides an opportunity to start a conversation about child development and how your center can help her learn about how she can best help her child learn and grow.

- **Ways to ensure their own safety.** Outreach workers should be encouraged not to enter any situation where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. They should be paired with a buddy or supervisor who is responsible for knowing where they are and monitoring their safety. For example, two individuals could canvas a block together, each approaching alternate houses. Outreach workers can also check in on a regular basis via telephone or beeper during the day as they conduct their rounds. Outreach workers should have a list of emergency numbers and know what to do if an accident or an emergency happens.

Overall, outreach workers should be persistent (but nonthreatening) and stress the voluntary nature of family support centers. To build trust with isolated families, offer nonthreatening activities such as a family night at the center. Once trust has been garnered, then the primary services can be promoted.

Make referral partnerships

One of the most effective ways to reach families is through other providers and institutions that already work with them. Make sure to set up an appointment with each of your key contacts, and get information about their organization and review it before you meet with them. In your meeting you should

- explain your center's philosophy and mission and how it relates to the work they do
- explain why you are trying to target this population
- learn from the contact about their perspective on the needs and priorities of the families you are trying to reach
- describe the services your center provides, focusing especially on the services and activities that may meet the needs of these families

- leave them brochures and fliers describing your center
- ask them to refer any families to you who they feel might benefit from your center's services
- ask them for an opportunity to come to their organization/program to talk with participating families about your center and the services and activities it offers

Other Outreach Opportunities

There are other ways to get the word about your center out to the families in your community:

- give speeches or presentations to community groups
- participate in service fairs
- have regular open houses or community events
- have a booth at local/community sponsored events
- sponsor a little league team or other local activity
- have a representative at a community place that gets a lot of traffic (busy corner, supermarket, waiting room)
- take out advertisements at local radio stations or in local newspapers
- sponsor a local event
- post fliers on community bulletin boards at libraries, public schools, supermarkets, and other public places.
- sponsor and/or participate in community sporting events

Evaluating and Improving Your Outreach

Outreach, like any center component, should be evaluated on a regular basis. Try to learn which outreach methods are the most effective, ensuring that all outreach is respectful, and try to enhance your outreach tools and strategies. This means not only monitoring how many new families come through the door, but how they match up to community demographics and the demographics of your target population, how they heard about the center, and their reactions to the outreach materials they received. You should regularly ask participants to review your outreach materials and make suggestions on how they can be improved. Ask outreach workers to do a sample presentation or door-to-door visit so you can help them work on techniques and evaluate their performance and people skills.

Follow up with families who chose not to use your center. (You may want to work with one of your referral partners to determine a few families who were referred but chose not to come). Have them help you understand why they chose not to come and whether different information or a different style of presentation might have changed their minds. Do not use this as an opportunity to make a pitch for them to participate now. They may feel pressured and be less likely to give you honest information.

Regularly evaluating your outreach efforts will help you improve your outreach strategies and ensure that you are investing your resources in outreach strategies that work.

Publicity and Promotion: Getting the Public to Support Your Center

Effective publicity and promotion are important for several reasons.* Media coverage can significantly increase your center's credibility and prestige with donors, making it more likely that you'll get that critical grant to set up and expand your services and activities. Media coverage of families often presents experts talking about what families need and want. But families discussing their experiences, including how your center has helped them succeed, can tell an even more powerful story. If your center is doing advocacy work on a particular issue, such stories can help influence the public to your side of the debate.

The success of family support centers is a well-kept secret—which is a problem when you're looking for backing from policymakers and others who are not in the know. Communications and public education are integral, intertwined parts of family support because they can significantly increase the family support movement's influence and long-term sustainability. Also, bringing attention to your center's activities will balance media stories about families and show the general public about the potential for social change through family support. Below are some steps that your center can take to promote its services.

How Our Center Does It

Nuestra Familia
Chicago, Illinois

Much of the work I do in public relations and publicity is about building partnerships and developing collaborations. Finding out what exists in the community, what works, who has the expertise, and how we can benefit from what's already out there is invaluable. I have started many new programs over the years, and my first step always is to canvas the community—through the mail and fieldwork students—to make contact with other organizations that already exist that may have anything to do with our work. We do this to see if the community needs us and to make sure that we're not duplicating efforts. We also want to avoid proprietary issues among community organizations, especially if there is a feeling that we will be competing for the same funding. Instead, we try to compliment the work of others. We look for local associations or working groups that already exist, and we try to contact them and meet with them on a regular basis. A local church network has been a great resource for us, especially in reaching out to parents with young children. Ministers and priests can be great sources for referrals.

Fliers don't bring us the most for our money. Building relationships in the community and working with program participants who are willing to talk to other groups in the community and promote our efforts helps us a great deal. And it's important to avoid any publicity that identifies your program as a place for people to go if they are in trouble. We don't emphasize problem solving or crisis control when we talk about our program. We want to be supportive and empowering. We want to employ the principles of family support on all levels—in reaching out to families, in working with our staff, and in building strong ties to the organizations that already exist in the community. It's all about building collaborations.

By Blanca Almante, Director

**Publicity* is when others, such as media, promote your center at no cost to you. *Promotion* occurs when your center underwrites exposure activities (e.g., fliers, advertisements, etc.)

Decide Who to Involve

This is a crucial step to get buy-in at the beginning of the process so that promotional activities are an integrated part of your center's work. Develop an ad-hoc committee to meet every quarter to reassess the plan. Potential committee members include board members, the executive director, frontline staff, center participants, and community members interested in family support issues, including local businesses and individuals with a background in media outreach and communications.

Center participants are especially good committee members because they can best inform the group how to target the community, and their input helps create community buy-in for your center.

Assign Your Media Spokesperson

The ideal spokesperson is a staff or board member who has done media interviews. If no one has a background in doing interviews, seek pro bono training by a local public relations group, supportive reporter, or communications department at an area college or university. You should also have a backup spokesperson in case the main spokesperson is on vacation, at a meeting, or otherwise unavailable when the media call your center.

Identify Your Target Audiences

The ad-hoc committee should discuss who are your target audiences for promoting your center. Potential audiences include community residents, funders, volunteers, the general public, media, and policymakers. The committee should rank the target audiences in order of priority to help guide your promotional efforts. It should also explore what the target audiences care about. For instance, funders are concerned that their grants are spent wisely and make a difference in families' lives. Community residents may be concerned about good schools, improving their neighborhood, and being good parents.

Craft a Unique Organizational Identity

You must not only assess your organizational image (i.e., how you are perceived by your target audiences based on their previous experience with you), but craft a brand identity (i.e., how you want your center to be perceived). What adjectives do you want associated with your center? Friendly, open, welcoming? How are you different from other centers? What makes your center unique, not only in the community but in your hometown as a whole?

Make sure that the adjectives that you want ascribed to your organization characterize its work and infuse its materials. For instance, if you want to known as a welcoming center, your promotional materials could include quotes from participants attesting to that friendliness. Ensure that the intake process is friendly. You may also want to host a periodic open house so individuals can see for themselves that your center is welcoming.

Evaluate Your Center's Promotional Materials

Every family support center promotes its services to some extent, be it by means of fliers posted in select locations, a brochure, a help card distributed in the community, or more extensive media relations efforts. To ensure that your center speaks with one voice you must examine your current materials. Whether you are a new or long-time center, examine your brochures and newsletters, special events, advertisements, fliers, and other outreach materials. Are they professional looking? Do they reflect the family-oriented focus of your center? Are they written in language that your target audience can understand? Graphics and materials should reflect the identity you are trying to project.

If you cannot afford to pay for the design and production of your promotional materials, consider teaming up with the advertising or marketing department of the local college, or with a local marketer or ad copy person who is willing to donate time.

Develop a Publicity and Promotion Plan

A publicity and promotion plan helps a center identify its target audience and outlines strategies for delivering messages about your center's effectiveness. Your publicity and promotion plan, which should be linked to your outreach strategies, should include the following:

1. **An overview**
   Create a one-year plan that identifies promotion goals, target audiences, and activities designed to reach these audiences. What activities do you wish to undertake? Is it informing a community about your new family support center? Informing the community and the media about a new, unique service that your center provides? Ensuring that funders know about your center's great work? Getting policymakers and the general public to understand the importance of funding prevention initiatives on child abuse and teen pregnancy? The overview should also outline three key messages about the center and family support in language that your core audiences can understand.

2. **An outline of promotion options**
   If your target audience is composed of parents with children under age six, find out where they hang out. Perhaps you want to ensure that every pediatrician and preschool center in town has your promotional materials or tip sheet. Maybe the local McDonald's would be willing to display your materials. Basically, you have to go where the parents are.

What specific activities can be undertaken to reach target audiences? Fliers in select locations? Word of mouth via influential community residents? Donated billboards? Profiles about your center in community newspapers?

3. **Specific activities that will be implemented, along with a timeline**
   Decide which activities you will undertake on a quarterly basis. Make sure that you don't undertake too much at once. It is better to do a few promotional activities well than to spread yourself too thin. The plan should also include a schedule of when the activities will be completed. The timeline will be useful when the ad hoc committee periodically reviews the progress of the plan. The timeline also provides an opportunity for the ad-hoc committee to divide up tasks and set clear deadlines for your staff and others.

4. **A process for reviewing your promotional efforts**
   Your center should review its promotion plan every quarter to assess activities and determine whether goals are being achieved. The ad hoc committee should explore what worked and what did not meet the center's expectations in order to increase the effectiveness of future efforts.

- Did you have more requests for services after your flier was posted?
- Did media coverage of your center increase after you disseminated information kits to reporters?
- Do more potential funders know about your program and its successes?
- Is the center behind schedule on the promotion plan, and if so, which activities should be scaled back?
- Is there enough staff and volunteer capacity to carry out the plan, and if not, how can the situation be rectified?
- Are the center's key messages reaching the target audiences, and has this resulted in positive feedback?

5. A budget

The budget should detail the size and scope of the center's communications and public education activities. For anything that costs money, consider in-kind contributions from a local public relations firm or consultant, an ad agency, or a communications, marketing, or advertising professor. For instance, a local billboard company may be willing to donate billboard space for your center during National Family Week (the week of Thanksgiving), or a local manufacturing plant might want to sponsor your table at the county fair.

Before approaching businesses, think about how your promotion activities are also in their interest. Do not assume that they will want participate because "it's the right thing to do." Businesses often want to know how charitable activities will increase their bottom line. The better the connection between your proposed activities and their bottom-line, the more successful you will be in getting promotional support.

To reduce costs, identify organizations and community leaders who may be interested in sponsoring joint outreach activities.

6. Strategies for cultivating relationships with the media

Who your staff and board members know can be crucial to forming relationships with the media. Perhaps a coworker is a neighbor of the local features reporter or your board president attends religious services with the managing editor of a prominent magazine in your community. If your budget permits, consider taking these people out to lunch to discuss how your center can be a resource for their stories. Or you may decide to hold an informal reception for local media at your center, along with a site visit. Media should also be invited to any open houses that your center sponsors. Overall, get to know the individuals who will cover your center's activities, educate them about family support, and be a resource for their stories. While these activities are time-consuming, they go a long way in building credibility and respect for your organization.

7. Strategies for taking advantage of local media opportunities

Programs on your local community access channel or talk radio are good starting points for getting your program's key messages across to a wider audience. These shows also provide an opportunity for staffers to build their media expertise.

Families as Spokespeople for Your Center

Center participants often make the most persuasive ambassadors for the effectiveness of your center. Uplifting stories, in families' own words, about achieving financial stability and building supportive neighborhoods can go a long way in educating the public about family support. However, your center must weigh the benefits and challenges of having families serve as spokespeople for your center. According to the Communications Consortium Media Center, there are four major benefits to having families serve as spokespersons:

- It provides an opportunity to celebrate the family's strengths and victories.
- Their testimonials may reach other families in similar situations who may need help.
- It shows that families are eager to help themselves.
- Their testimonials may help policymakers, reporters, and the public understand how children and families are working hard to improve their lives.

However, families should also know the potential risks in serving as spokespersons. For instance, parents or their children may be ostracized by others who hear their story. Families should also be comfortable with the prospect that others in the community will know about the problems they have encountered and the services that they received. Centers should also ensure that families do not feel exploited by reporters about telling their personal stories.

How Our Center Does It

Resurrection Project

Chicago, Illinois

Publicity and public relations are part and parcel of the work we do at the Resurrection Project. It doesn't matter if you have a good center if no one in the community knows it exists. Publicity is about getting your message and name out there in order to get resources, financial and other—people are more likely to invest in something they already know.

You need a publicity campaign that accurately represents you, so that people in the community know you and how to access your resources. You also want to make sure that the people who come to your center don't think you offer something totally different from what you do. It's also extremely important that your publicity efforts remain sensitive to the culture and language of the people you serve.

You should never depend on printed fliers or an ad in the local paper to bring in participants to your center. The most effective publicity work depends on interpersonal relationships. If those relationships don't exist, the publicity efforts won't work. Engaging participants in community publicity strategies works best. This means getting community members invested in promoting your center and in the development of your publicity. You also need to train them as direct participants in your publicity efforts and on how to talk to the media. We work hard to make participants the leaders in our publicity campaigns.

Reaching out to churches in the community has been very beneficial to our center, especially when participants do the outreach and make the initial contact. Holding public graduation ceremonies for participants has also helped publicize our efforts, build trust for the center in our community, and increase participation, especially from men in the community, who often are the most reluctant to become involved in our efforts. All of these efforts have generated community recognition for our center and motivated others to participate.

By Susana Vasquez, Deputy Director

Ways to Publicize and Promote Your Center

Despite its not-for-profit status, your center is a business. To effectively publicize and promote your services, your center will have to market its unique qualities and build loyalty among target populations. Below are some ways to publicize and promote your center.

- **Develop a brochure and have it displayed in key locations**
  The brochure should list the center's contact information, key services, families served, and successes. Quotations from participants are useful for conveying the importance of your center to the community. Be sure to design the brochure in language that your target audience can understand, including language translation if necessary. After you develop the brochure, you may want to send it to local religious institutions, restaurants, schools, and any other places where your target audiences congregate.

- **Create a list or card file of key reporters at media outlets**
  Take note of who covers stories about family issues in your local newspaper, television, or radio. These reporters are prime targets for disseminating information about your center, and their stories also provide clues about what topics appeal to their audiences. You can also call local media and ask who covers family issues. Your media list should include television, radio, newspapers, and local magazines that are viewed or read by your center's target audiences, be they center participants or policymakers. It is also helpful to keep track of how reporters like to be contacted, as many have specific preferences to be contacted by mail or fax, or at certain times.

- **Collect newsworthy items and send press releases or media alerts***
  Collect any before/after profiles, parenting tips based on your center's experiences, items that are unique, your center's work on any controversial local issues, or local perspectives on national trends and issues. Make sure to alert the media about this information so you can get covered!

There are four major ways to generate media coverage:

1. Organize an event.
2. Generate news releases on key topics and local versions of national trends.
3. Present profiles of center participants who have transformed their lives with the help of your center.
4. Conduct media interviews.

Remember that the media generally do not want to cover meetings or conferences, unless they feature a major newsmaker or have implications for the general audience. Below is a table of special event months and potential story angles that your center can use:

Event	Potential Tie-Ins
The New Year (January)	How to be a better parent by building on strengths
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday (January)	The effectiveness of community-based violence prevention strategies

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**Media alerts* announce specific events—such as a press conference or your center's ribbon-cutting ceremony. *Press releases* generally outline an organization's position on a key issue.

Event	Potential Tie-Ins
Black History Month (February)	The strengths of black families
Child Abuse Prevention Month (April)	Community strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect
Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month (May)	What your program finds effective in preventing teen pregnancy, "a day in the life" of a teen father
Mother's Day (May)	Tips on being a better mother, profile of a mother overcoming challenges
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (May)	The strengths of Asian American families, the challenges that Asian refugee families face at your center
Father's Day (June)	Tips on being a better father, profile of a father overcoming challenges
Child Support Awareness Month (August)	How your program encourages fathers to increase their involvement in their children's lives
Anniversary of Federal Welfare Reform (August 12)	Progress of welfare reform in your community, remaining challenges that welfare-to-work poses in your community
National Campaign for Healthier Babies Month (September)	Strategies that your community has used to reduce infant mortality, child health insurance challenges that your center addresses
National Communicate With Your Kid Month (September)	Tips for strengthening parent-child bonds, at various stages of a child's development
National Substance Abuse Prevention Month	Community strategies to prevent substance abuse
Grandparents' Day (first Sunday after Labor Day in September)	Challenges that grandparents who utilize your program's services face in raising their grandchildren
Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15)	Strengths of Latino families
National Family Week (week of Thanksgiving in November)	Tips on how parents can improve their family life during the week, how your program strengthens and supports family life in your community
Family support and homelessness (holiday season)	How your program is serving the "changing faces of homelessness" (e.g., families with young children)

Depending on the medium, other story ideas include profiles of your center, its executive director, or a staff member with a unique story to tell. Remember that television stations are primarily concerned about visuals, so your story ideas should also include potential visual opportunities. On the other hand, radio stations prefer story ideas with good audio.

When developing a press release, remember to keep the target audience in mind. Why would your target audience be interested in the story? Would you be interested in the story? How can you sell the story? Be judicious in the number of news releases you disseminate to ensure that they're truly newsworthy (see the newsworthy checklist at the end of this section).

Press releases should be on your center's letterhead, with the date, "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE," and a contact name and phone number at the top. A catchy headline, on one line and in bold, will help draw the reporter's eye to the basic message of your release. The release should also be double-spaced to enable the media to make any editing changes to your release, and be no longer than two pages. Attention-grabbing quotes from your executive director or delegated spokesperson also enhance the press release. Near the end of the news release, include a paragraph about your organization, which is often used to provide background in media stories. Don't forget to designate the end of the release with "-30-" or "# # #" so reporters know that they have received the entire release.

For maximum results, press releases should be followed up with telephone calls to reporters so you can promote your story ideas to them and to ensure that they received the information. Keep in mind that reporters will not respond to every press release—particularly if your center is new and thus not well-known—and your center should not give up achieving media coverage because you do not achieve immediate results.

- **Make a flier**
  Fliers advertising your center's events or services can be created and posted in key locations to draw individuals to your center.

- **Send an information kit to the media and policymakers**
  The information kit can be a folder with sheets about your center's core services, a family support fact sheet, and your brochure.

- **Create a newsletter**
  A newsletter is another vehicle to promote your center's activities. Your newsletter can feature ongoing classes at the center, special events, photos, and profiles of program participants. A newsletter can also provide an opportunity for program participants to develop skills that can be transferred to the workplace. Many newsletters can be designed on desktop programs. Depending on your budget, your center may want to issue a monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly newsletter. The newsletter is another distribution tool that can be given to center participants to spread the word about your center, and should also be disseminated to funders, policymakers, and key allies. The center may also want to explore the possibility of local businesses underwriting the costs of each newsletter edition.

- **Utilize public access channels and public affairs shows**
  Federal Communications Commission requirements require radio and television stations to dedicate a portion of their airtime to public affairs issues. Programs that address these issues are often looking for guests, but interviews usually must be booked two to four weeks in advance.

- **Plan and promote special events**
  Increase your center's visibility by placing any regular support groups, community forums, anniversary events, or benefits on the event calendars of community newspapers and television and radio stations. Also use fliers and word of mouth. Some special event ideas include:

  - a Family Support Day
  - an open house to introduce your center to the community
  - a family expo with other family support centers (perhaps cosponsored by local businesses) to make families aware of what support is available
  - a panel discussion on local family support issues
  - cosponsoring a family video contest or photo essay contest with the local newspaper or school during National Family Week (the week of Thanksgiving)
  - a Lobby Day to encourage state legislators to provide more funding for family support centers
  - a voter registration campaign
  - inviting policymakers to visit your center.

Refer to special event months table above for more opportunities for your center to host an event that promotes its activities.

- **Return media calls promptly**
  Reporters are usually on deadline and rely heavily on reliable sources. In order to be considered such a source, your center must respond to media requests in an efficient manner. If a particular request doesn't relate to your center's work, refer reporters to other family support programs and resources for more information.

- **Develop public service announcements**
  Public service announcements (PSAs) can enhance any other activities that you plan. You should contact the community relations departments of local radio and television stations to inquire about requirements and deadlines for PSAs. These can usually be written or recorded on compact disc or tape, and they are typically between 10 to 60 seconds in length. PSAs generally must be prepared a month before your event to be included in stations' programming schedules. A foundation or business may be willing to underwrite the cost of producing PSA tapes.

- **Organize a letter-writing campaign**
  A letter-writing campaign is an opportunity for your center to showcase key issues, particularly when policymakers are making crucial decisions that affect your center. Your center may be interested in sponsoring a letter-writing party to encourage your center participants to write to local newspapers about the challenges facing their families.

- **Write an op-ed column or commentary**
  Most newspapers provide opportunities for individuals to write editorial pieces about key issues. Op-ed (short for opinion-editorial) pieces are generally under 800 words long and focus on a timely policy issue. Your center may want to localize a national issue, for example by highlighting the status of welfare reform efforts in your area. Or perhaps your center has helped resolve a controversial family issue in your community. In addition, radio stations may be willing to allow you to discuss your key issues in 30 seconds or less if your commentary has implications for its listeners or your hometown in general. When writing op-ed columns or commentary, always remember to write with the media's target audience in mind.

- **Sponsor a press conference**
  Press conferences should be reserved for important announcements only—a major research study, for example, or a key conflict occurring in your community. It is expensive to rent the equipment needed for press conferences; see if you can find a business willing to underwrite the costs. If you're scheduling a press conference, be sure to disseminate a media alert (see the sample at the end of the chapter) no later than three days before your event. Follow up with a telephone call to gauge how many media representatives plan to come to the event. If your hometown has a local wire service that distributes a daily list of press conferences to local media, send your media alert to them to help ensure that your press conference is included.

- **Stay on the radar screen of key donors and potential donors**
  Any media stories about your center should be sent to foundations and major donors so they are aware that others view your program as successful. Invite donors to any special events that the center is sponsoring. An open house is a prime opportunity to showcase your program to donors. You may also want to keep track of the birthdays, major holidays, and life changes celebrated by key donors, and send a little note. The better your center tells its story, the more public support there will be for the services that your center provides.

How Our Center Does It

Avance Family Support and Education Program

San Antonio, Texas

Public relations and publicity are very important to the work we do at Avance. They are our lifeline to the community and are important to our funding, to building partnerships with other organizations in the community, and in recruiting board members. I incorporate public relations work whenever I'm asked to speak—I always talk about the center's work, and I'm always promoting it's mission as well as the needs and service gaps in our community. Representation in the media has been especially important to our organization. I believe that one has to try to get the media to cover what your center is doing with parents and children as much as possible, so that the local community and funders know your work. It is very important that the media know you and your center and that you know the media representatives in your area on a first name basis. A positive story in the media can be very helpful when you are seeking funding or when your funding is being cut—the media have been very helpful to us in critical times. Although we've never had the funds to actively promote public relations or publicity, we have been very fortunate to receive media attention from the large, national media outlets, such as Newsweek, Business Week, and the News Hour with Jim Lehrer. We never actively sought the attention that we have received from them. The good work that we do attracted the New York Times. After they did a piece on us, others followed.

By Gloria Rodriguez

Crisis Management: Maintaining Your Center's Reputation

Social service agencies are becoming increasingly responsible for managing crisis situations that occur within their walls. A crisis management strategy—with an emphasis on prevention—is crucial to maintaining your center's reputation. If your center is faced with a controversy, such as a child dies under your care, or your center faces accusations of abuse or financial negligence, media relations can become very important. The best way to handle such situations is through advance preparation. Your spokesperson should practice the ability to speak publicly under pressure.

The cost of not being prepared in advance can be high:. A crisis can affect your center's reputation with the surrounding community. Your center may be held legally liable for the crisis. Foundations and individual donors may be less willing to underwrite your center's activities due to public relations fallout from the crisis. Although everyone hopes that such incidents will not occur, family support centers must nevertheless be prepared for such possibilities.

Your communications ad-hoc committee should draw up a one-page plan detailing what the center will do in the case of a crisis. Brainstorming five worst-case scenarios will be useful when developing the plan. Staff and board members should be alerted to the process as well. The center should ensure that everyone understands that the organization's spokesperson speaks with the media so the center speaks with one voice. The center should also ensure that it builds relationships with key players—the media, community activists and other allies, funders, and policymakers—before trouble hits.

It is far better to address the crisis head-on than to refuse to speak with the media. Otherwise, media reports that your center was consistently "unavailable for comment" will suggest to the public that you have something to hide or that the center is stonewalling on an issue.

In addition to the media, the relationships that your center has developed during its outreach activities—with religious leaders, area businesses and schools, other community groups, and program participants—will also prove useful allies should your center face a threat to its reputation. All of the organizations and resources listed under publicity and promotion in the "Resources" section can also assist family support centers with crisis management issues.

Sample Media Alert (on organizational letterhead)

February 4, 1999
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

contact: Susan King
123/789-4560 ext.126

MEDIA ALERT

Middletown to Acquire Its First Family Center

WHAT: The Middletown Family Support Center (MFRC), the city's first family support center, will be dedicated. The center is a partnership between the Middletown Family Support Network, Middletown Grammar School, and Middletown Family Health Clinic. Housed in the grammar school, the center will provide parenting classes and support groups, childcare, and job-training programs to help area children and families succeed.

WHO: Mayor John Doe and State Representative Kathleen O'Neal, among others, are expected to attend the ceremony.

WHEN: Wednesday, February 10, 1999, 6 pm to 8 pm.

WHERE: Middletown Family Support Center, 5678 Main Street, Middletown.

Visual and Audio Opportunities

- A ribbon-cutting ceremony, headed by Mayor John Doe, to officially dedicate the Middletown Family Support Center
- The Middletown Children's Choir singing songs about the strengths of our nation's families
- A tour of the center's facilities

WHY: Middletown Family Support Center (MFRC) is a community organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening Middletown's families. The ability of community-based family support centers to make a difference in the lives of children and their families is one of America's best-kept secrets. As Middletown grapples with the challenges associated with family life, such as childcare, teen pregnancy prevention, and welfare reform, MFRC will offer important lessons about what works and why.

# \# \# \#

Sample Public Service Announcement (on organizational letterhead)

DATE: February 4, 1999

CONTACT: Susan King, 123/789-4560 x126

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

END DATE: February 10, 1999

Public Service Announcement

:15 SCRIPT

The Middletown Family Support Center offers various programs to help children and their families succeed. Call 123/789-4560.

:30 SCRIPT

Founded in January 1999, Middletown Family Support Center (MFRC) is a community organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening Middletown's families. MFRC provides parenting classes and support groups, childcare, and job-training programs to help area children and families succeed. For information about the center's programs, call 123/789-4560.

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Tips

- Ask media outlets about their preferred method of receiving public service announcements, as well as about deadlines.
- Always include contact information at the end of your center's public service announcements.
- As the media receive many PSAs from not-for-profits, try to tie your center's PSA to a national issue trend (welfare reform) or special event (e.g., National Family Week).
- Disseminate PSAs to the community relations department of local media outlets, and follow up with a telephone call.

Sample News Release (on organizational letterhead)

November 15, 1999	contact: Susan King
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE	123/789-4560 ext. 126

Activities Mark National Family Week

Middletown Family Support Center Highlights 10 Ways for Families to Celebrate

Middletown—Families across the nation will be taking part in activities to celebrate the 50th Annual National Family Week November 21–27.

"Healthy families are essential to the future of our city as we head into the new millennium," said Sarah Williams, executive director of Middletown Family Support Center. "As we give thanks on Thanksgiving, families citywide are looking for ways to celebrate their achievements and build on their strengths."

Middletown Family Support Center, a community authority on practices that promote strong families, recommends 10 ways that families can celebrate National Family Week:

- Have one meal a day together, and let the children help prepare it.
- Develop a Family Pledge, where the family lists its goals for the year and how they will achieve them.
- Construct a family tree on paper or on the computer.
- Have older family members tell stories about their past, and tape-record them as an oral history.
- Do something special as a family. Rent or go to a movie, read together, or play games.
- Read to your children one night and have them read to you the next.
- Phone, write, or e-mail relatives whom you haven't spoken to in awhile.
- Have your children teach you something: how to use the computer, dance, roller skate, etc.
- Encourage your leader to give a talk about families and mention Family Week.
- Plan how to make Family Week last all year.

Founded in 1985, Middletown Family Support Center (MFRC) is a community organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening Middletown's families. MFRC provides parenting classes and support groups, childcare, and job-training programs to help area children and families succeed.

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Sample Script: Telephone Media Pitch

Susan King of Middletown Family Support Center: Hello, Ms. Taylor. Do you have a few minutes to talk?

Jane Taylor, Features Writer at ABC Newspaper: Yes.

Middletown Family Support Center: I'm Susan King of Middletown Family Support Center. I'd like to tell you a little about a project we've been doing for a few years. Under the Healthy Moms, Healthy Kids initiative, we've been collaborating with Middletown Family Health Clinic to ensure that pregnant women in our community get connected with prenatal care. As you may know, our community is one of the poorest in the state, and our infant mortality was the highest in the state. However, this initiative has cut our community's infant mortality in half.

ABC Newspaper: Sounds very interesting. Can you tell me a little more about your center?

Middletown Family Support Center: Well, we're a community center that believes that in order to do the best we can by our community's children, we must strengthen and support the entire family. We also believe that the best way to help individuals help themselves is to work from a family's strengths. Toward these ends, our activities include parenting-skills classes on child development issues, childcare, and youth groups. We have a support group for never-married fathers reconnecting with their children. Most of these men are quite young, and we help support them in their efforts to provide emotional and financial support to their children. We also provide job-training courses to help individuals make a permanent transition from welfare to work. If you'd like, I can send you additional information about our center, particularly on the Healthy Moms, Healthy Kids project.

ABC Newspaper: That would be great. Just fax it to me at 123/456-7890. Also, give me your telephone number and address. Would it be possible for me to interview some participants of your center's programs? Father's Day is coming up, and we'd like to do a profile on the challenges facing young fathers....

Tips

- Have at least three potential story ideas available when you call reporters. If they don't respond to your first idea, they may be interested in some of the other ideas.
- Practice your pitch before you get on the telephone, particularly on questions that the reporter will probably ask.
- Always ask the reporter if he or she has time to talk before launching into your pitch. Keep your pitches brief.
- If the reporter requests information, always send them in a timely fashion.
- Reporters are generally easier to reach in the mornings, particularly before 10 am.

Checklist 1: Building Your Outreach Capacity

Identify your target population

___ We have reviewed community demographics to determine populations who would particularly need the services our center offers.

___ We have compared current participant demographics to the community's demographics to determine which groups are not utilizing our center's services.

___ We have determined which of our underutilized services need targeted outreach.

___ We have instituted measures to ensure that our outreach efforts do not outstrip our center's capacity.

___ Our center has reviewed current and prospective grants to see if they list any specific populations whose needs the dollars are supposed to address.

___ Our outreach efforts stem from our program's mission and goals.

___ We have spoken with others (teachers, religious leaders, etc.) to determine whether there are specific groups or populations that are isolated or in need of family support services.

Learn about the families you are trying to reach

___ We have identified the formal and informal services that our target populations use.

___ Our center has identified the places where our target populations spend their time.

___ Our center has culturally sensitive materials and culturally diverse outreach workers reflective of the diversity in the community.

___ We have identified the organizations to which our target populations belong.

___ Our center has identified the community groups and individuals that our target populations respect.

___ We have outlined our target populations' concerns and priorities, both for themselves and their children.

___ We have identified reasons why our target populations would be interested in our center's services and activities.

Develop your outreach plan

___ Our outreach plan includes a description of our target population(s) and our outreach goals.

___ Our plan outlines locations where we will be able to make contact or leave information for our target population.

___ We have identified key community contacts who have relationships with our target population and can serve as ambassadors for our center.

___ Our outreach plan includes specific strategies along with a timetable for when the tasks will be completed and how we will monitor our progress.

___ Our current center participants are heavily involved in developing and carrying out our outreach plan.

Implementing outreach strategies

___ We have developed eye-catching written outreach materials that include pictures of individuals who look like the families we are trying to reach and graphics which reflect their culture.

___ Our outreach materials are in a language and at a literacy level that our target population can understand.

___ Our outreach materials state (1) why people should utilize our center's services; (2) our center's mission and services; (3) who can participate; (4) any costs or that the service is free; and (5) our hours of operation, center location, and contact information.

___ We have identified current center participants who can help spread the word about our center.

___ We have instituted a door-to-door outreach strategy that includes (1) information about the center; (2) training and safety precautions for the outreach worker; and (3) any goodwill gifts that we will use to establish rapport with our target populations.

___ We have posted fliers where our target populations congregate.

___ We have positioned outreach workers where our target populations congregate.

___ We have hosted an open house to introduce the community to our center's activities.

___ We have identified community events where we can have an information table.

___ We have cosponsored community events.

Making referral partnerships

___ We have set up appointments with key community contacts to discuss potential partnerships.

___ We have reviewed information about potential partners before our meetings with them.

___ In meetings to discuss potential partnerships, we have

- explained our center's mission and how it relates to the work of our potential partners
- explained why we are trying to reach our target populations
- described our center's services, particularly those that may meet the needs of our target families
- learned about our prospective partner's perspective on the needs and priorities of the families we are trying to reach
- left outreach materials with our potential partners
- asked potential partners to refer to us any families who they feel might benefit from our center's services
- asked them for an opportunity to come to their organization to talk with participating families about our center and the services and activities we offer

Evaluating and improving your outreach efforts

___ We regularly evaluate our outreach efforts.

___ We monitor how many new families utilize our program's services and how they match up to community demographics and the demographics of our target population.

___ We ask new families how they heard about our program and about their reactions to the outreach materials they received.

___ We regularly ask participants to review our outreach materials and make suggestions on how they can be improved.

___ We have outreach workers do a sample presentation or door-to-door visit to our staff so we can help them work on techniques and evaluate their performance.

___ We follow up with families who choose not to use our program to understand why they chose not to come and to find out whether different information or a different style of presentation might have changed their minds.

Checklist 2: Building Your Communications Capacity

Decide who to involve in your promotional activities

___ Our board members have been recruited to serve on the promotional committee.

___ Our executive director has been recruited to serve on the promotional committee.

___ Frontline staff members have been recruited to serve on the promotional committee.

___ Center participants have been recruited to serve on the promotional committee.

___ Community members have been recruited to serve on the promotional committee.

___ At least two individuals with backgrounds in media outreach and communications have been recruited to serve on the committee.

___ We have organizational buy-in about the importance of promoting our center.

Assign your media spokesperson

___ We have identified our key and backup spokespersons.

___ Our media spokesperson has experience doing media interviews or will be trained to do media interviews.

___ Our backup media spokesperson has experience doing media interviews or will be trained to do media interviews.

___ Our media spokesperson and backup are both well versed in the organization's mission, goals, and activities.

___ Our media spokesperson's role and authority in the organization has been cleared with the executive director and/or relevant board members.

Identify your target audiences

___ We have identified our target population and audience(s) (e.g., community residents, funders, general public, media, policymakers).

___ We have noted why we are targeting our select population and audience.

___ Our center has developed specific strategies for promoting our key messages with target audiences.

Craft a unique organizational identity

___ We have assessed how our organization is or will be perceived by our target audiences, based on their previous experience with us or organizations similar to ours.

___ We have identified adjectives that we want associated with our center (e.g., friendly, diverse, welcoming).

___ We have identified qualities that make us unique from other social service programs in the area.

___ We have decided to host at least one open house so individuals can become acquainted with our center.

___ Our center has a tagline, listed on our promotional materials, that captures the essence of our mission (e.g., "making a difference for children and families").

Evaluate your center's promotional materials

___ Our promotional materials reflect the adjectives that we want associated with our center.

___ Our promotional materials are proofread by at least two individuals for grammatical and spelling errors.

___ Our promotional materials reflect the professional image that we want to project to other social service agencies.

___ Our promotional materials are in language that our target audience(s) can understand.

___ We have sought pro bono assistance from the advertising/marketing department of the local college, or with a local marketer/ad copy person to review our promotional materials.

Develop a communications plan

___ Our communications plan identifies our promotion goals and how they fit into our organization's mission.

___ Our communications plan outlines three key messages that we want our target audience(s) to know about our center.

___ Our communications plan outlines our target audience(s).

___ Our communications plan describes the activities we plan to undertake to reach our target audience(s).

___ We have identified places where our target audience(s) congregate so that we can promote our center at those locations.

___ Our plan identifies our key and backup spokespersons.

___ Our plan outlines how our spokespersons will be trained to articulate our key messages and the tough questions they may be asked about family support.

___ We have outlined a schedule for when our promotional activities will be completed.

___ We have set quarterly dates on our calendar to assess the progress of our communications plan.

___ We have finalized a budget for our activities and have solicited funds to help us meet our promotion goals.

___ We have identified potential partner organizations and community leaders who may be interested in sponsoring joint outreach activities.

___ We have outlined a crisis management strategy in case a major crisis situation occurs at our center.

___ We have outlined our strategy for cultivating relationships with the media.

___ We have asked our board members, frontline staff, and program participants if they have any media contacts.

___ We have set a date for media representatives to visit our center to see our center in action.

Families as spokespeople for your center

___ We have spoken with the families about the benefits and possible costs of doing media interviews.

___ We have identified at least two families with powerful stories who can speak about the benefits of our center.

___ We have notified center participants, in advance of media interviews, that they don't have to answer questions that they find intrusive.

___ We get permission to interview children from their parents prior to the interview.

___ We have prepared talking points outlining key messages to articulate and have reviewed with program participants in advance of media interviews.

Ways to promote your center

___ Our center has letterhead.

___ We have developed a brochure, which includes our center's contact information, key services, families served, and quotes from center participants about center benefits.

___ We have displayed our center brochure and fliers at key locations where our target audience congregates (e.g., religious institutions, restaurants, schools).

___ We have created a list of contacts from media outlets viewed, read, or listened to by our target audience(s).

___ We have collected before-and-after profiles of participants (and gotten their permission to use them).

___ Our press releases are on our center's letterhead and include the date, "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" (or the date in which the information can be released), a contact person and number, a catchy headline, and double-spaced text.

___ We send copies of media coverage that our program gets to our funders and major donors.

___ We invite media, funders, and donors to our special events.

___ We have sent an information folder about our center to the media and policymakers.

___ We have a set process for who is responsible for returning media calls.

Building relationships with the media

Newsworthiness checklist

___ Our event or story is unique.

___ Our event or story features a well-known local figure, celebrity, or institution.

___ Our story focuses on a significant conflict or resolution to a conflict.

___ Before-and-after success profiles of center participants have been collected with their permission.

___ Our event or story can be tied to human emotions, in addition to ideas (e.g., love, fear).

___ Our story is a local angle on a national news story.

___ Our story is related to other timely issues in our local news.

___ Our event or story includes appealing visuals and photo opportunities.

News release checklist

___ Our news release is no more than two pages long and is double-spaced.

___ There is a short (no more than one line, centered, and bolded) headline on the news release.

___ Our news release is written like a newspaper article, with short paragraphs.

___ The news release is dated (if mailed, one or two days ahead of the date you're sending it).

___ The news release has both the work and home telephone numbers of the center's media liaison.

___ If the news release is more than one page, "-More-" appears at the bottom of the first page.

___ "-30-" or "# # #" appears at the end of the press release to alert reporters that it is the last page.

___ News releases are on our center's letterhead.

___ Our news release is dated.

___ Our news release addresses basic questions that a reporter would have about our story.

___ Our news releases are checked for spelling or grammatical errors.

___ Our news release have left and right margins of at least one inch.

___ Our news release contains a catchy quote from our executive director or spokesperson.

___ Our news release ends with a paragraph about our organization's mission.

___ The most important information is located in the first two paragraphs of our news release.

Media relations checklist

___ We have created a list of key reporters at media outlets viewed or read by our target audiences.

___ We return media calls promptly.

___ We update our media list at least once every quarter to take into acount media staff turnover.

___ We are concise and brief when pitching reporters by phone about a potential story.

___ Media calls are conducted in the morning to avoid conflict with reporters' deadlines.

___ We ask whether the reporter has time to talk before pitching our story.

___ We send an information kit to reporters who cover issues that our center addresses.

___ We invite the media to our key events so that they can become more familiar with our center.

Interviews checklist

___ Our center prepares talking points containing our key messages about an issue or our center.

___ We have prepared and practice five- to seven-second sound bites containing our center's key messages.

___ Our spokesperson is aware that he or she should not speak "off the record."

___ Regardless of the question, our responses always make a bridge back to the key messages we wish to make about an issue or our center.

___ Even if the question is negative, our responses always use positive words.

___ During interviews, we avoid jargon and speak in language that is understandable to the audience.

Collaboration

___ We have identified partner organizations and community leaders who may be interested in sponsoring joint outreach activities.

___ We have developed a media relations task force with other local family support centers in order to promote our common goals.

___ We have approached foundations, businesses, and colleges/universities about providing funds and pro bono services.

___ We have approached other organizations (e.g., the local Chamber of Commerce, churches) about sharing a web site or a specific web page on their site.

Crisis communications

Advance planning

___ Our center has developed a crisis communications strategy in case our center should face media scrutiny.

___ Our staff and board members are all knowledgeable about each step of our crisis communications strategy.

___ Our key and backup spokespersons are trained to deal with crisis communications, or will receive pro bono training.

___ We have brainstormed five worst-case scenarios and how our center would deal with such public relations crises.

___ We have drafted a list of difficult questions that reporters could ask about our center's operations and our center's response to them.

____ Our center has retained an attorney to handle our legal issues. Our attorney has experience with public relations concerns.

____ Our executive director views public relations as part of his or her job description.

____ Our center's leadership understands that as a not-for-profit, we are accountable to the public for our center's activities.

____ Our center's leadership understands that public relations crises often concern the perception of a problem, and not just the problem itself.

If your center faces a public relations crisis

____ We have held a staff meeting to reinforce the importance of our spokesperson being the sole liaison with the media.

____ Our center has reviewed the crisis situation and is taking steps to rectify the situation (if applicable).

____ We have prepared our spokesperson about the crisis and our center's response, and have heard their responses to key questions to ensure that our center's response sounds believable.

____ Our center interacts with the media, funders, and key allies honestly and promptly (all calls answered within 10–15 minutes).

____ We have notified our board members about the crisis.

____ We have notified our major funders about the crisis if the crisis is being publicized.

____ Our spokesperson remains calm at all times.

____ Our center does not speak "off the record" with reporters.

____ Our center provides at least some information to our key allies, funders, and media, or explain to them why we can't offer certain information at the moment.

____ We only proffer facts or actual activities undertaken to rectify the situation; we do not speculate about what our center will do.

____ We keep track of what the media says about the center during the crisis.

____ Our spokesperson does not repeat negative words in reporters' questions, but turns the question around and emphasizes the positive.

____ Regardless of the questions, our spokesperson refocuses all media questions back on the key points our center wishes to make about the controversy.

____ If our center is taking steps to rectify a problem, we have indicated these steps to the media, funders, and key allies.

Resources

Outreach

Publications

Building Villages to Raise our Children: Outreach
1995. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Family Research Project.

Essential Allies: Families as Advisors
By Elizabeth S. Jeppson and J. Thomas. 1995. Bethesda: Institute for Family-Centered Care
Kingsbury, K. J. (1991).

Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs
By James A. Levine. 1995. New York: Scholastic Inc.

Know your community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources assessment.
By B. Samuels, N. Ahsan, and J. Garcia. 1998. 2nd ed. (Chicago: Family Support America).

Lessons from the Child Survival/Fair Start Home-Visiting Programs
By M. Larner. November 1998. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association. Boston, Mass.

Schools Reaching Out: Family, School, and Community Partnerships for Student Success
By D. Davies et al. 1991. *Phi Delta Kappa* 72(5) 376-382.

Organizations

Center for the Study of Parent Involvement
John Kennedy University
370 Camino Pablo
Orinda, CA 95560
925/254-0110

Harvard Family Research Project
Harvard University
38 Concord Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: 617/495-9108
Fax: 617/495-8494

Institute for Family-Centered Care
7900 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite #405
Bethesda, MD 20814
Phone: 301/652-0281
Fax: 301/652-0186

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202/822-8405
Fax: 202/872-4050
iel@iel.com

Parents as Teachers
10176 Corporate Square Drive, #230
St. Louis, MO 63132
Phone: 314/432-4330
Fax: 314/432-8963

Publicity and Promotion

Publications

Making the Case for Family Support: An Essay With Supporting Documents
1996. Chicago: Family Support America.

Promoting Issues & Ideas: A Guide to Public Relations for Nonprofit Organizations
By M. Booth & Associates. 1995. New York: The Foundation Center.

Public Relations Workbook: Writing and Techniques
By R. Simon and J. M. Zappala. 1996. Lincolnwood, Ill.: NTC Business Books.

The Publicity Handbook: How to Maximize Publicity for Products, Services, and Organizations
By David R. Yale. 1991. Lincolnwood, Ill.: NTC Business Books.

Targeting Media Relations: A Step-by-Step Guide to Cost Effective Public Relations
By D. Wragg. 1993. Portland, Ore.: Kogan Page Limited.

Working with Families: Working with the Media
1991. Washington, D.C.: Communications Consortium Media Center.

Organizations

The Benton Foundation
1634 I Street NW, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202/638-5770
Fax: 202/638-5771
benton@benton.org
www.benton.org

Center for Strategic Communications
72 Spring Street, Suite 208
New York, NY 10012
Phone: 212/965-0180
Fax: 212/965-0185
csc_info@pipeline.com
www.csc.org

Communications Consortium Media Center
1333 H Street NW
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/326-8700
Fax: 202/682-2154

Public Media Center
466 Green Street
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: 415/434-1403
Fax: 415/986-6779
www.publicmediacenter.org

References

Jeppson, E., Thomas, J., Markward, A., Kelly, J., Koser, G., and Diehl, D. (1997) Making room at the table: Fostering family involvement in the planning and governance of formal support systems (Chicago, Ill.: Family Support America)

Levine, J., Murphy, D., and Wilson, S. (1993) Getting men involved: Strategies for early childhood programs (New York: Scholastic)

Appendix

Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement

Finding the Path: The Future of the Family Support Movement

By Virginia L. Mason, Executive Director, and Bernice Weissbourd, Founder and Board President, Family Support America

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

Family support has made tremendous advances over the past 25 years. More than 20 states fund state-wide programs; Kentucky alone funds more than 600 Family Resource and Youth Service Centers. Local foundations and city governments are coming together to support city-wide programs in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, and countless other locations. At the federal level, family support has been written into legislation such as the Community-based Family Resource and Support Programs, Empowerment Zones, and Early Head Start.

It is our hope that these developments reflect a growing recognition that promoting the healthy development of children and families is a priority and that as a nation, it is imperative that we consider what is good and bad for them. We look forward to a future in which family support centers are acknowledged as key elements of what makes a community thrive and are universally available. We are committed to creating the type of quality program described in these volumes. In order to reach this goal, individuals, organizations, and government entities everywhere must:

- continue to define and develop our understanding of quality practice in the family support field
- strengthen the communities in which we work
- build a public understanding of the importance of family support and use that understanding to shape national policy for children and families
- move from parent partnerships to parent leadership

The time for family support as a field and as a movement is now. It is time to strengthen the coalition, to unify around common language and structures, and to recognize the power and value of thousands of organizations and programs and millions of families coming together as Family Support America.

Quality Practice in the Family Support Field

One of the lessons that we have learned over the past 25 years is that the family support field knows what works for children and families. In 1996, Family Support America published *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*. This book brought together the best knowledge from more than 2,500 practitioners and parents around the country regarding what it means to practice family support. The resulting principles of family support practice shaped *Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit* as they have shaped everything that Family Support America does. As more and more people and programs become a part of the family support movement, attracted by growing global interest in and increased funding for family support, it is important that we continue to remain faithful to these principles and to what we

know about quality practice. We also must push these principles forward and continually develop our understanding of what they mean for practice in a field that is continually evolving in the face of the changing realities of children and families in our nation. We see a future in which the principles of family support are explicitly woven into the work of every program, agency, and other setting intended to serve children and families across the country. To reach that future, the family support field must:

- operationalize the principles of family support practice, looking at how they apply to all areas of family support practice and to other fields.
- identify outcomes and indicators that are associated with what family support programs do: build the skills and capacities of families and their members. This involves moving away from evaluation models that focus on our ability to prevent low-incidence negative outcomes (child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, etc.) and instead identifying outcomes that are associated with promotion and our ability to achieve what we hope and dream for our children.
- come together to define a learning agenda for the field and identify how we can each contribute to making that learning agenda come alive. What are the areas in which we need further research? How can we more intentionally learn from each other? How can we learn from the commonalties and differences from program to program?
- build our understanding of the needs and strengths of families across the life span—not just those of families that include young children.
- strengthen both pre-service and in-service training and other learning opportunities for those in the family support field.

You can be part of this future by:

- using the principles as a template to shape your planning processes and work
- educating your staff, participants, and community partners about the principles of family support practice
- sharing examples of how you have brought these principles to life in your program
- hosting on-going dialogues about quality family support practice with program staff and parents
- engaging in evaluation activities to monitor the quality and effectiveness of your program on a regular basis; these activities help make the case for continued investment in your program and those like it and help you learn about what the program is doing well and in what ways it needs to change
- providing information on your program

Family Support America is initiating a nationwide project of disseminating and collecting surveys of family support centers. Please contact our headquarters to obtain a survey. The information from these surveys is being used to build a program database that can speak authoritatively about where family support is taking place across the country and about the characteristics of family support programs. The database will connect parents to family support programs in their communities, connect practitioners with each other, and help policymakers to understand the scope and reach of the family support field.

Strengthen Our Communities

Recently, much attention has been paid to the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." In the field of family support, this adage represents a truth that we have known and acted on for many years. We know that just as the healthy development of children is inextricably tied to the health and strength of the families in which they live, the strength and stability of the family is influenced by the community in which its members live. Family support programs work in partnership with a host of community institutions to promote economic well-being, community life, and the overall health of the communities in which they are located. Model programs are engaged in community-building efforts that help to transform communities into not only good places to raise children, but supportive environments for all residents.

While programs have been engaged in community-building work at the local level for a long time, family support, in general, has operated in a sphere separate from that of traditional community development programs.

As a field, we need to:

- build stronger connections to the community development field
- identify model community-building efforts within the family support field
- ensure that community systems of support that are comprehensive, integrated, and easy to access are a central priority of family support
- continue to develop strategies to reach the most isolated families and to connect them to a web of supports within their communities

Your local program can:

- engage parents in civic life by connecting them with the local PTA, neighborhood block club, family support center, or other community entity
- organize activities that improve the physical environment of the community, such as neighborhood clean-ups, neighborhood gardens, and community arts programs
- identify and address community issues as they arise, whether by organizing a neighborhood watch or community policing effort, addressing violence in the community, or advocating for needed services or support
- build strong collaborative relationships with those in your community who provide the formal and informal services on which families depend
- be an active part of community planning and community-building efforts

Build Public Understanding of Family Support to Shape National Policy

The family support field needs to send the message to legislators and other elected officials, public and private funders, and our nation at large that supporting families is essential to our health, our stability, and our future. Sending that message requires that each of us working in our individual communities be the spokesperson for the importance of the family support movement and take part in the national dialogue on family support issues. Making the case for family support is both a moral imperative for our nation and a sound investment in our future. Finally, we need to send the message that family support belongs in every place in which children and families are present, not only in community-based programs and state agencies and human services systems, but also in schools, libraries, health care settings, workplaces, stores, and businesses.

As a field, we need to:

- create materials that communicate clearly what family support is and why it is important
- use the experiences of our day-to-day family support work to shape a national understanding of how we can best support children and families
- connect to the constellation of movements that care about children and families—the youth development movement, health promotion movement, community development movement, and others are all part of this larger picture
- work to shape our family-serving systems (e.g., health, schools, and social services) so that they are guided by the principles of family support practice and incorporate family support approaches
- create a common family support language and set of symbols—as we grow as a movement, we need to begin to speak with a unified voice and to demonstrate the power of our numbers

Your local program can:

- participate in state-wide and local advocacy coalitions that broaden public support regarding issues that affect children and families
- become a part of your statewide or local family support network
- become a part of Family Support America
- send letters to your congressional representatives about the important work your program is doing and the need for more programs like yours
- serve as a spokesperson for the family support movement in local, state, and national forums
- collaborate with churches, libraries, and other community-based programs to build partnerships that will make family support more widely available to the families in your communities

Move From Parent Partnerships to Parent Leadership

One thing that family support programs have always done well is building partnerships of equality and respect with parents. These partnerships are at the core of family support and of the quality practice described above. We also talk about the important role of programs in developing parent leadership and engaging parents as advocates in their communities and in our society as a whole. Family support recognizes the right and the obligation of parents to engage in leadership. We also know that this is a challenging task. The reality is that most parents have a host of responsibilities on their hands, and adding the tasks involved in being an advocate can be overwhelming. We need to think broadly about parent engagement and build a continuum that begins with involvement and moves toward partnership and leadership, that is responsive to the realities of parents' lives but provides multiple genuine opportunities for parents to be engaged and take leadership at all levels of the family support movement. If we are going to put the issues of children and families on the national agenda, parent leadership is essential, and it cannot be carried out by small group of people who have an abundance of time or skills but must represent a broad spectrum of parents, including those who are currently the least likely to have their voices heard.

As a field, we need to:

- support parent leaders who can help to raise awareness of the importance of issues that affect children and families and participate in decisions about the policies that have impact on their lives
- work with other national organizations to ensure that parents' voices are welcomed and called for at the national, state, and local policy tables at which decisions that affect children and families are made
- raise up the voices of all of the parents in our programs
- find and disseminate information on promising practices and programs in parent engagement

Your local program can:

- give parents leadership roles by creating opportunities for them to shape the direction of your program
- support parents as they take on leadership roles in the community and in other arenas
- provide substantive training for parents on advocacy, policy making, and other issues that will help them to build their leadership skills

Just as the past 25 years have been a period of remarkable growth for family support, so the future is full of promise. It is, perhaps, not dreaming to envision family support centers in every community just as we expect to have libraries, parks, and schools. It is possible to project a time in which the family support center has the characteristics of a community center: that it is a place in which people gather and can make connections; an educational resource from which families learn the best possible way to relate to their children based on an understanding of how children develop; a base at which parents become advocates for family-friendly polices; a forger of connections between parents and whatever they need, whether it's job skills training, ESL classes, or GED preparation; a link in a chain of family support programs in the state, through which parents shape programs and polices that affect their children's lives.

The principles of family support practice could well become the nexus of change for social, health, and education services, and that process is now in its initial stages. The recognition that healthy children, families, and communities are the fundamental building blocks for a strong society calls for a parallel recognition that children, families, and communities need and deserve supports in order to reach their goals. Seeking support is no longer perceived as a sign of weakness, but rather as an indication of the strength to control one's life. No society is built on independence alone. It is only when independent people work together and value their interdependence that good things happen for all.

In developing a family support center, you can become an active player in the family support movement. Together, the family support movement can expand the possibilities of the everyday work that you do and of the community of which you are a part. Our goal is to transform the nation, so that when a public official visits a community, his or her first question is, "How are the children doing?" When that time comes, we will have changed the way America works for families.

As a program developer, you are a vital part of the process. The family support movement, Family Support America, is a coalition and requires active participation of all of its members in their programs, communities, and families. Every voice is important. Every individual makes us stronger. You are an important part of this movement, and all of us at Family Support America look forward to working with you.

For a complete catalog of publications or information on technical assistance and training, contact:

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